Sunday Morning Post

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JOHN LEE SETS THE ECONOMIC PATH

After two years in the job, the chief executive says city is back on track

> PAGE A4



ARMS CONTRACTORS TURNING TO DRONES

Low-cost UAVs a major source of growth for Chinese manufacturers

> PAGE A7



WHY FILIPINOS ARE DEMANDING ACTION

South China Sea tensions send ties with China to their lowest point

> THIS WEEK IN ASIA

27th HANDOVER ANNIVERSARY

'SPECIAL HK SPIRIT IS KEY TO FURTHER SUCCESS'

Head of Beijing's liaison office says city can rely on continuing support, while John Lee strikes upbeat note on 'increasingly effective' policies

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Hong Kong will be able to sustain its success if it believes in the country's support and continues to embrace its valuable "spirit", Beijing's top man in the city has said ahead of tomorrow's 27th anniversary of the financial hub's return to Chinese rule.

Separately yesterday, Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu said the city's character helped it to "sail through the wind and waves", which contributed to his administration's "increasingly effective" policies.

He made the assessment in a social media post accompanying a video released by his office that showed him on a ferry discussing the government's achievements over the past two years.

Lee also appeared at an event marking the beginning of celebrations for the July 1 anniversary, where the director of the central government's liaison office in the city, Zheng Yanxiong, asked Hongkongers to maintain belief in four areas, including the value of the "Hong Kong spirit".

Zheng said such spirit combined love for both the country and the city, self-reliance, a drive for excellence and a proactive mindset of adapting to changes.

"[This spirit] has enabled Hong Kong to overcome various risks and challenges, and achieve success after success," he said.

Zheng reminded residents that Beijing's support would only become "stronger and stronger", with more policies that benefited Hong Kong's development to be introduced. "Hong Kong is fully capable of achieving its own better development by integrating into the overall development of the country," he said.

He noted the city should continue to believe in the "one country, two systems" governing principle, which contributed to its unique and irreplaceable status.

Zheng said another area Hong Kong people should maintain faith in was that national security guaranteed development.

He said the city was now "safer, more open, more anticipated and more welcoming" thanks to the introduction of the domestic national security law.

Hong Kong enacted the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance this year in accordance with Article 23 of the Basic Law, the city's mini-constitution.

The Beijing official said the people of Hong Kong had never shied away from crises and changes, nor had they feared taking risks and facing competition.

"In the midst of crisis, they will foster new opportunities; amid upheaval, they will open up new frontiers. Through innovation and creativity, they will achieve new breakthroughs and a resurgence for Hong Kong," he said.

Veteran political commentator Sonny Lo Shiu-hing said the four areas outlined by Zheng showed that the central authorities believed that some Hongkongers still had a crisis of confidence amid the current economic predicament, where consumer spending was flocking to the mainland in the midst of socio-economic integration.

"It is obvious that Beijing would like Lee, who's about to enter his third year in office, to revive the local economy and bring about prosperity," Lo said.

Zheng's remarks were echoed in Lee's video, in which he said his administration had "never been afraid of any challenges and difficulties" and always stood up to tackle problems.

"My administration operates like a ship – the direction must be correct, the beliefs must be unified and the speed must continuously accelerate.

"When facing waves, we will break through them and let this ship move towards the goal," Lee wrote in his Facebook post introducing the video, which is the first of a two-part video series his office made for the 27th anniversary.

"And I am pleased to see that many of the policies introduced by this government have become increasingly effective."

In the clip filmed on a Star Ferry vessel crossing Victoria Harbour, Lee reviewed his administration's work in the two years since he took up the top job in 2022, including the resumption of quarantine-free travel in the wake of the pandemic, enactment of the Article 23 law, the establishment of community care teams and the application of a policy to ensure only "patriots" could be involved in governance.

He also highlighted the government's efforts to address subdivided housing, with the waiting time for public housing being kept below six years.

On the economic front, Lee touched on the scrapping of all property cooling measures, which he said had allowed "a significant rebound" in transactions and the stable development of the market. He said the city's hosting of more than 200 mega events throughout this year would also boost tourism and the retail sector.

"Looking to the future, the government will continue to play the role of providing the stage and directing, creating opportunities for Hong Kong. Likewise, various industries must leverage their respective strengths and perform their own roles well," Lee said.



At a launch ceremony in Victoria Park for the handover anniversary yesterday are (from left, front) Cui Jianchun, the nation's top diplomat in Hong Kong; Zheng Yanxiong, director of the central government's liaison office in the city; Chief Executive John Lee; Dong Jingwei, Beijing's national security chief in Hong Kong; and Major General Wang Zhaobing of the PLA Hong Kong Garrison. Photo: Yik Yeung-man



Outward bound

City residents arrive at the Hong Kong section of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge yesterday, just some of the hundreds of thousands taking advantage of the July 1 handover anniversary long weekend to head out of the city.

By 4pm, 451,515 people had left Hong Kong through its various ports, with city residents accounting for 391,665. A total of 196,828 arrivals were recorded, with mainland visitors making up 86,496 of those entries.

The long weekend coincides with today's opening of the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link, which will shorten travel time between Hong Kong and cities on the other side of the Pearl River Delta, as well as encourage leisure travel.
Photo: Edmond So

POLITICS

'Hurt feelings' clause cut from public security law

Beijing says the proposal was subjective and open to misinterpretation

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China has dropped a highly controversial clause from a legislative amendment that would have punished anyone guilty of "hurting the feelings of the Chinese nation".

The clause was dropped from a revised draft of Article 34 proposed for the Public Security Administration Punishments Law and submitted to the top legislature, the National People's Congress (NPC), for a second review at its session last week. The public has until July 27 to submit feedback on the proposal.

The original clause – "producing, disseminating, propagating or spreading articles or remarks that are harmful to the spirit or the feelings of the Chinese nation" – has been removed from the article.

In the first proposed draft amendment released in September last year, the clause stipulated six acts that could attract up to 15 days in detention, including "wearing, displaying or decorating in public places, or forcing others to wear, display or decorate, clothing or symbols that are harmful to the spirit or the feelings of the Chinese nation".

The phrases "harmful to the spirit of the Chinese nation" and "hurting the feelings of the Chinese nation" in the previous version of Article 34 were dropped, Shen Chunyao, deputy chairman of the NPC constitution and law committee, said last week.

The phrasing was subjective, with potential for misinterpretation, which would make it "difficult to define its meaning in legislation and hard to grasp in law enforcement", Shen was quoted as saying by Communist Party mouthpiece People's Daily.

"There is concern that law enforcement may infringe upon the legitimate rights and normal life of the public. Considering various factors and law enforcement needs, this draft revision will not use this expression any more."

The clause regarding dress has been amended to: "wearing, displaying, or decorating in public places or forcing others to wear, display or decorate clothing or symbols that promote or glorify aggressive war or aggressive behaviour, causing a negative social impact".

Observers said the revisions were a positive sign.

"It is truly heartening to witness the National People's Congress taking the citizens' opinions on Article 34 into serious consideration and opting to eliminate vague and overly broad language from the article," said Liu Sida, a law and sociology professor at the University of Hong Kong.

"It is undeniable that the thoughtful input from legal scholars and ordinary citizens has had an impact on the lawmaking process. This development is a hopeful sign of China's ongoing legal transformation."

Liu said a key aspect of lawmaking involved minimising ambiguity, as unclear legal text could lead to excessive or even ill-intentioned interpretations during law enforcement.

"This is particularly significant for laws concerning personal liberty, such as the Public Security Administration Punishments Law."

According to the NPC website, a total of 93,975 people submitted 125,962 opinions on the first draft amendment during September.

A Shanghai-based lawyer said the revision could help prevent abuse of administrative power and reduce situations in which personal freedoms were compromised by enforcement.

By removing vague and contentious language, the law's intentions on administrative penalties could be made clearer, which would be a positive development, she said.

Last year, the proposed clause triggered a backlash amid widespread concerns in the legal community about potential abuse, given that the punishments law, released in 2006, targeted minor offences and is generally enforced by local police who do not need court approval for such enforcement.

> This development is a hopeful sign of China's ongoing legal transformation
>
> LIU SIDA, UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

This law does not consider violations to be crimes but offenders face fines, detention and a public record, which could affect their future education and job prospects.

Lawyers and observers had raised concerns the proposed Article 34 could fuel extreme nationalism, potentially creating an environment in which using vague phrases such as "harmful to the Chinese nation's spirit" could be applied to suppress dissent.

"This article should not be passed at all [in the first place] because 'detriment to the spirit or feelings of the Chinese nation' is ambiguous and usually connected to personal behaviours that do not cause actual harm to anyone … and hence should only be judged by moral norms instead of by written regulations backed up by government power," a Beijing-based lawyer said, requesting anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

Critics have pointed to a few worrying episodes regarding growing nationalistic sentiment in China. In 2022, a woman was taken to a police station and accused of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" – a "pocket crime" long used to silence dissidents – for wearing a traditional Japanese kimono on a Japanese-style street.

In March, China's biggest bottled water company Nongfu Spring came in for a wave of criticism for the perceived Japanese styling of its packaging.

Although the firm was not subjected to police action, some nationalist groups launched a campaign against the firm, accusing it of "betraying the nation" and "hurting national interests".

The company has also been accused of being too focused on profits and not doing enough to ensure water security in China.

SOCIETY

Slain heroine's family turns down donation offers

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The family of a Chinese woman fatally wounded protecting a Japanese mother and child from a knife attack has asked the public to respect their privacy and turned down offers of donations.

The official Suzhou Daily reported on its Weibo account yesterday that the family of school bus employee Hu Youping was thankful for the many expressions of concern and condolence.

"We are very grateful for everyone's kindness … If kind-hearted people wish to donate to promote positive energy, we suggest they donate to foundations across the country for courageous acts," the family was quoted as saying.

Hu, 54, died last Wednesday, two days after she was stabbed multiple times trying to restrain an attacker at a school bus stop in Suzhou, Jiangsu province.



Hu Youping died from wounds she got protecting a mother and child.

The man first attacked the mother and child waiting at the stop and then tried to get on the bus, which was carrying Japanese children.

Suzhou police said Hu immediately rushed to help and her courageous act "prevented more people from being hurt".

The mother, who was also wounded, was quoted by Xinhua as saying Hu stopped the attacker and enabled her son to escape.

The attacker was a 52-year-old unemployed man, it said.

Hu's bravery prompted suggestions online that the local government create an account for the family that the community could contribute to.

But the family said that after discussions among its members "we decided not to accept donations or gifts, and hope not to be disturbed. We only hope that the deceased will rest in peace and the family can return to a peaceful life as soon as possible".

The Japanese embassy in Beijing flew its flag at half-mast on Friday in tribute to Hu.

Ambassador Kenji Kanasugi also posted a video on the embassy's WeChat account, offering his condolences on behalf of Japan's government and people for Hu.

Kanasugi described the school bus attendant's courage and kindness as representative of the general Chinese public.

The ambassador said an initial police investigation concluded that the incident was an isolated one, although inquiries were continuing into the suspect's motive.

Foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said Hu exemplified the kindness and bravery of the country's people and their willingness to help others.

Other tributes to Hu included a light display on the Tianjin Radio and Television Tower in the northern municipality, describing the deceased as "A Hero with a Capital H".

The attack ignited a flurry of ultranationalist and anti-Japanese comments on social media, which were quickly deleted.

Weibo said on Wednesday that it had banned 36 accounts for posting such comments.

"Some individual users have posted extreme remarks that incite national sentiment and promote group hatred, even calling for criminal acts in the name of patriotism," Weibo said.

Monday's attack was the latest knife incident in which people have been wounded in public places.

On June 10, a 55-year-old man was arrested for stabbing four United States university tutors at a public park in the northern province of Jilin.

"Police told us that he was unemployed and down on his luck, and that somebody in our group bumped into the man," one of the four American college instructors was quoted as saying by NBC News.

"And he decided to respond in the way he responded."

In Shanghai, a man allegedly wounded three passengers with a knife at a subway station on June 19.

And a man was arrested in the Guangxi region in southern China on Friday, accused of stabbing two people to death after an argument, according to Shanghai-based news outlet The Paper.

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DAY BY DAY

MY TAKE - CLIFF BUDDLE

Hong Kong's unique features are as vital now as they were in 1997

As the city seeks to move on from recent troubles and meet the challenges ahead, the concept behind 'one country, two systems' is the best hope

Hong Kong's return to China in 1997 was a leap into the unknown. No one knew how the famously capitalist city, a British colony for more than 150 years, would fare as part of a communist country.

As we mark the 27th anniversary of the handover tomorrow, questions about Hong Kong's future under the "one country, two systems" concept remain. It is still work in progress.

The city has undergone sweeping changes following civil unrest in 2019, new national security laws and political reforms. It is battling to recover from the social and economic impact of the pandemic.

Some argue that one country, two systems, with its promise that Hong Kong's way of life would remain unchanged, has already run its course. Beijing, meanwhile, has repeatedly declared its continued commitment to the concept.



An independent judiciary is expressly provided for. This is an integral part of the rule of law

The reality is that it remains the best hope for Hong Kong. There is simply no alternative but to make the best of the arrangements.

Over the years the form they have taken has changed as have the hopes and expectations of many Hong Kong people.

The focus on national security, a response to the 2019 anti-government protests, has inevitably emphasised the "one country" part of the equation.

But the dust has now settled after five turbulent years. Hong Kong is said to have moved "from chaos to stability". Now, it seeks greater prosperity. Success will depend on its ability to rebalance, focusing more on its own system and the elements that make it different to mainland China.

At the heart of one country, two systems is the principle that the city enjoys a "high degree of autonomy". Precisely how high is not defined by the law. But the idea is that Hong Kong, led by local people, will to a significant extent, be responsible for determining its own future as a part of China.

The city will play an increasing role in the country's development and further integrate with the mainland.

But there are many areas in which the local government should be making its own decisions without requiring approval from – or trying to second-guess – Beijing. The words "on its own" appear 20 times in the Basic Law.

The perception, at least, is that there has been less of that amid Beijing's heightened interest in Hong Kong, following the 2019 protests. But the one country, two systems concept depends on it.

Another key component is the city's common law legal system. An independent judiciary is expressly provided for. This is an integral part of the rule of law.

The recent departure of three foreign judges from Hong Kong's top court has sparked renewed debate about the independence of the judiciary amid the strong political headwinds of recent years.

Judicial independence must be strengthened and supported, in practice as well as in principle. The judges need to be given space and support to decide cases freely, fairly and fearlessly.

The rule of law is often referred to, in the context of national security, as a "sword". But it is also supposed to be a shield, ensuring that freedoms are protected and officials operate within their legal powers.

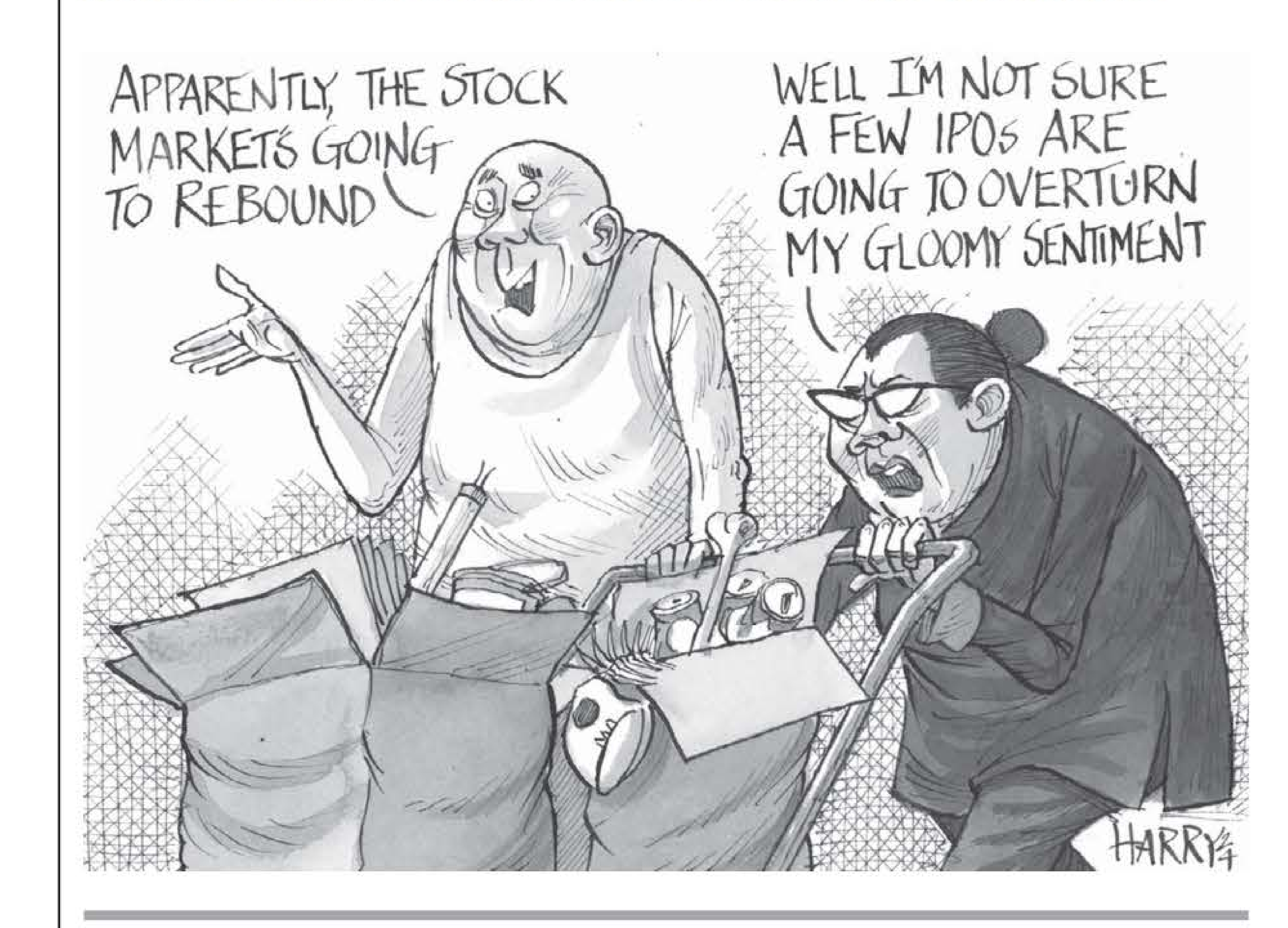
Hong Kong's role as an international financial centre, aspiring legal hub and, more broadly, China's "superconnector" all depend on ensuring the core principles of the legal system are preserved and rights, including free speech, protected.

On the night of the handover, the city's new chief executive Tung Chee-hwa said: "For the first time in history, we, the people of Hong Kong, will be master of our own destiny." That destiny is still being shaped.

The one country, two systems concept was designed to preserve the city's unique features, notably its capitalist credentials, international outlook, rule of law and protection of freedoms.

As Hong Kong seeks to move on from the troubles of recent years and meet the challenges ahead, those features should be strengthened. They are as important now as they were in 1997.

HARRY'S VIEW ON A REVIVAL OF IPOs ON THE HK MARKET



VIDEO SPOTLIGHT

John Lee in uphill battle to secure Hong Kong's future



Two years after taking office, Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu has shifted his focus from enforcing national security to improving the lives of residents and rebuilding the city's economy. But he faces formidable challenges, stemming from geopolitical tensions between China and the West with Hong Kong caught in the middle.



Lee discusses all this and more with the Post's managing editor of content, Yonden Lhatoo, in this episode of Talking Post.

POSTS FROM THE PAST


Sunday Morning Post
TRUCE CALLED IN TRADE WAR

2019

China and the United States have reached a trade truce after a leaders' summit, with Washington agreeing to put on hold new tariffs on Chinese products and ease curbs for American firms to sell to telecoms giant Huawei Technologies. President Xi Jinping and his US counterpart Donald Trump also agreed to resume trade talks.

2014

A man in Japan has set himself on fire at a busy intersection in Tokyo in an apparent protest against Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's plans to ease limits of the country's pacifist constitution. Japan is poised for a historic shift in its defence policy by ending a ban that has kept the military from fighting abroad since World War II.


South China Morning Post
Deal signed on yuan settlement
Drink-drivers face stiffer penalties under study set to go before Legco

2009

First-time offenders for drink-driving should be banned from getting back behind the wheel for at least two years if their blood-alcohol level was three times over the legal limit when they were caught, according to a consultation paper to be discussed by the Transport Advisory Committee.


South China Morning Post
All signs point to a stronger recovery

2004

The city is showing signs of further economic growth, with a host of positive indicators released recently. International credit rating agency Standard & Poor's upgraded its long-term outlook on the Hong Kong dollar to stable, while a leading bank and a business chamber raised their forecasts for the city's growth in 2004.

CONTENTS

NEWS HOTLINE 2565 2252 **CLASSIFIED ADS** 2565 8822
SUBSCRIPTIONS & DELIVERIES 2680 8822

MARK SIX

The first prize in last night's draw was not won. The winning numbers were 7, 21, 29, 30, 36 and 46. The extra number was 42. The HK$1,686,080 second prize was won by a single ticket. Third prize paid HK$76,850 and was won by 58.5 tickets.

LEADING THE NEWS

SOCIETY

Suicides in city at 16-year high with nearly 1,100 cases

Experts say increase may be related to struggling economy, call for more support for young people

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The Coroner's Court handled nearly 1,100 suicide cases last year, the highest in 16 years, prompting a major help group to call for more social support for younger people.

Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong yesterday said 1,092 suicides were reported in 2023, the highest since 2006, and 12 cases higher than the previous year. About 52 per cent, or 573, involved people aged between 20 to 59. The rest comprised 43 involving individuals aged 19 or younger, 473 aged 60 or above, and three cases with their ages unknown.

Samaritan Befrienders executive director Clarence Tsang Chin-kwok said the increase in suicides might be related to the economic and social environment. "Hong Kong's economic environment is in a state of a downturn, which might put pressure on people to strive harder to support their livelihoods," he said.

More than half, 571 of the 1,092 cases, last year involved people falling to their deaths.

Tsang urged schools to keep an eye on young people and their emotional needs.

To better connect with young people, the group has launched "Chatpoint Youth Crisis Angel Training Programme", which aims to provide continuous emotional support to those in need through online chat rooms.

Cheung Nga Man, a student from Polytechnic University's faculty of social work, had done an internship with the group and said the experience equipped her with the skills to handle crises.

"One particularly memorable case involved an individual who shared with me upfront that she wanted to commit suicide," Cheung said. "This shocked me and I tried my very best to counsel her and have a dialogue with her."

She added that the experience helped prepare herself as a social worker in the future.

Professor Paul Yip Siu-fai, founding director of the Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention at the University of Hong Kong (HKU), said unemployment and economic conditions in the city might have contributed to the rise in the number of people taking their own life.

"The economic issue affected the middle aged most. While the health problems of the elderly are usually regarded as the major reasons for them to commit suicide," Yip said, adding that both the mental and physical health of older residents should be a priority.

The emigration wave might have also increased the chances of elderly people suffering from loneliness as they might have lost carers, he said.

Paul Wong Wai-ching, associate professor of HKU's department of social work and social administration, said the number of suicides was expected to remain high for a period of time, given the economic and political situation.

"It is expected that a sharp decrease in the number of suicide cases might not be happening next year," Wong said.

A total of 168 students with mental distress were referred to public psychiatry clinics through the three-tier school-based emergency mechanism between the start of December last year and March, the Education Bureau revealed earlier this month. Seventy-five inquiries from principals had also been received through a designated hotline.

But only 3 per cent of the cases were categorised as urgent, 40 per cent were semi-urgent, while the rest were stable or already receiving psychiatric care.

If you have suicidal thoughts, or you know someone who is, help is available. Dial 18111 for the government-run "Mental Health Support Hotline" or 2896 0000 for The Samaritans and 2382 0000 for Suicide Prevention Services.

Beating the heat



People keep cool taking part in water activities at the Slide & Splash Summer Party at the Water Sports and Recreation Precinct in Wan Chai yesterday. The Hong Kong Observatory recorded a temperature of 30 degrees Celsius in Tsim Sha Tsui at 8pm and forecast more hot weather today, broken by showers and squally thunderstorms. Photo: Edmond So

NATIONAL SECURITY

'PROTEST' RESIGNATIONS OVER PLANS FOR REFORM

Departure of chairman of Social Workers Registration Board, which oversees 27,000 workers, leaves body with just one elected member

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The chairman of a statutory body overseeing social workers has joined several other members in resigning from the board, with critics labelling the string of departures as "irrational" and a "protest" against government reform plans.

The resignation by Ng Yut-ming, the chairman of the Social Workers Registration Board which oversees 27,000 employees in the sector, leaves only one elected member on the board. His departure came days before the expected passage of the legislative amendments to reform the body on Wednesday.

Ng confirmed yesterday that he had resigned from his position on Friday night, but declined to comment further.

Apart from Ng, another six elected members, including deputy chairwoman Toby Ho Sze-man, Chan Kwok-bong, Adino Chung Wai-lun, Lam Chiu-wan, Phyllis Luk Fung-ping and Grace Wong Kam-kuen had also quit over the past two weeks.

The wave of resignations has left only one elected member, Oscar Lai Man-lok, on the board. Lai earlier told the media he would attend the oath-taking ceremony on Friday for members of the new board.

The Social Workers Registration Ordinance empowers the board to handle the registration of social workers, as well as disciplinary matters.

Earlier in May, the city's key decision-making Executive Council backed the government's proposed amendments to the ordinance to increase the size of the board from 15 to 27 with more government-appointed members than elected ones.

The decision followed accusations by Secretary for Labour and Welfare Chris Sun Yuk-han who said the board failed to take concrete action to prevent people convicted of national security offences from registering as social workers.

Under the amendments, the number of elected board members will remain at eight. But the appointed members will increase from six to 17.

The body will also be empowered to promptly deregister social workers convicted of certain crimes and permanently disqualify those involved in serious offences such as endangering national security.

Social worker Eddie Tse Sai-kit said he believed elected board members who left were disheartened by the authorities' attacks on the board and its reform giving more influence to government appointees.

He said although the members' resignation would not impact the board or the sector in the short term, the amended legislation would have a huge impact on the industry in the long run and push more people to leave while discouraging others from joining.

Lau Siu-kai, a consultant of the Chinese Association of Hong Kong and Macau Studies, called the resignations a "protest" against the reform of the body that he said was previously dominated by "radical" pro-democratic members.

"The majority of the members on the board were pro-democratic, and that's why they adopted a relatively lenient attitude when maintaining social worker discipline and punishing social workers," he said, referring to the body's handling of workers involved in national security offences. "This led to the government's dissatisfaction and its decision to restructure the board."



> Under the new environment, social workers should also shoulder responsibilities
>
> LAU SIU-KAI, ACADEMIC

Lau said the government's overhaul was intended to prevent the board from shielding offenders, and ensure that registered professionals upheld professional ethical standards.

"Under the new environment, social workers should also shoulder responsibilities and must not do anything to undermine Hong Kong's stability and threaten national security," he said.

In a reply yesterday, the Labour and Welfare Bureau said it had no additional comment other than the remarks by labour chief Sun the previous day.

Sun said on Friday that the resignation of several elected members would not affect the operation of the board.

"This is their own decision. As for whether their resignation will have an impact on the operation of the board, I can say clearly that the new amendments are very clear, and even if a member resigns, it will not affect the board's operation," he said.

The Social Workers Registration (Amendment) Bill 2024 was introduced into the legislature last month for scrutiny. Lawmakers are expected to proceed to the second and third reading on Wednesday.

Sun said if the bill was passed, the previous body would cease operation after it was gazetted on Friday, when relevant members were to take oath to ensure the transition to a new board.

The oath will require them to uphold the Basic Law, the city's mini-constitution, and bear allegiance to the city under the new amendments.

Minister Sun had earlier defended the reform, saying the move was needed to "bring the board on track", adding that he was not worried the move would strain relations between the authorities and social workers or affect future cooperation.

HK Express fires worker over eating egg tarts

Ground crew member 'violated rules for handling food left behind by passengers'

Harvey Kong and Lo Hoi-ying

Cathay Pacific Airways' budget airline HK Express yesterday confirmed a ground crew member had been fired over the handling of a passenger's Portuguese egg tarts.

The confirmation came after a social media post went viral on Wednesday, questioning whether it was proper for a ground crew member to eat the food.

According to the airline, the ground crew member hired by an outside company violated the firm's proper procedures for handling food left behind by passengers.

"The staff member involved has been terminated by the relevant ground handling service provider, and all staff have been instructed to strictly adhere to the proper standard handling procedures," the company said.

"We allow passengers to bring food and beverages on board; however, consuming outside food and beverages in the cabin is not allowed. Ground staff will remind passengers of these regulations before boarding, but they will not confiscate passengers' food."

The viral post on Instagram included a picture of several people digging into three boxes of Portuguese egg tarts from fast food chain KFC, with a caption saying they had belonged to a passenger who tried to bring the tarts on board.

The airline stated that it always put customers first, noting it did not tolerate any behaviour that did not comply with its service standards.

"In response to this incident, HK Express has reviewed the current handling procedures with the service provider and has required the company to enhance internal training to ensure that all staff providing services to HK Express passengers meet professional standards," the airline said.

Checks by the Post found that Greater Bay Airlines also did not allow passengers to eat outside food and drinks on board, while Hong Kong Airlines did not have any specific guidelines on the matter.

The city's flag carrier Cathay Pacific allows passengers to bring food and drinks onto its aircraft but said crew members would not help passengers refrigerate or heat up their meals.

Budget airlines from other countries have varying regulations on whether passengers can eat outside food on their aircraft.

Scoot, the budget arm of Singapore Airlines, and Malaysian budget airline Air Asia prohibit outside food on board.

Japanese budget carrier Peach Aviation and Korean low-cost airlines T'way Air and Jeju Air did not have clear guidelines on outside food on their websites.

DIPLOMACY

China's actions, not US pressure, making Berlin rethink policy, envoy says

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Beijing's changing behaviour towards Europe has compelled Berlin to re-evaluate its China policy, a top German diplomat has said.

Speaking at the Hudson Institute in Washington, Thomas Bagger, state secretary at the German foreign ministry, declared that Berlin's stance towards China had moved to a heightened rivalry, a response to Beijing's actions rather than pressure from Washington.

"It's quite clear that the emphasis has shifted from a focus on partnership and cooperation to more competition," Bagger said as he acknowledged that decoupling from China would "hurt our economy tremendously".

Even so, Germany was seeking to reduce its dependency vulnerabilities in areas like technology, critical minerals, even medical equipment, Bagger noted. "China's approach to us, to its neighbours, to the international arena has changed in a way that forces us to revisit our own China policy," he added.

Bagger reiterated that European officials did not agree with the US "on everything". "Our policy or China strategy or changing approach is a reaction to your policies, to your actions … We're not America's poodle," he said.

Nor did Europe regard China as a "geopolitical challenge" to its "primacy", he said.

"Europeans don't look at ourselves as No 1."

Last week, after a nine-month investigation into alleged unfair state subsidies, the European Union imposed new tariffs of up to 38 per cent on Chinese electric vehicles. The decision came a month after the US imposed 100 per cent tariffs on Chinese EVs.

Beijing has retaliated by launching an inquiry into European pork products. And, fearing action against its own auto industry, which is heavily dependent on the Chinese market, Berlin has opposed EU tariffs. Talks between Beijing and Brussels are under way, with the new taxes taking effect on Thursday.

Yet Bagger warned that China's support for Russia in its war on Ukraine would have repercussions for its relationship with Berlin.

"If and when China continues to violate Europe's core interest in security on the European continent, this will have an increasing cost on China," he said.

"That cannot be compartmentalised," he added. "If you continue to support Russia's war effort against Ukraine, that will have consequences also for our bilateral and European-Chinese relationship."

Led by the US, Western nations contend that, despite their sanctions, Russia is meeting nearly 90 per cent of its semiconductor needs for tanks, missiles and aircraft through dual-use imports from China.

Bagger was visiting Washington ahead of the Nato summit here, scheduled for July 9-11, when the transatlantic alliance's 32 members are expected to pass a US$107 billion multi-year aid package for Ukraine.

The issue of the war is far from settled in Washington. Donald Trump, the former US president and presumptive Republican nominee for the presidential election in November, vowed to withdraw US military aid to Ukraine during his debate on Thursday with President Joe Biden.

Asked how Europe, in particular Germany, was preparing for a potential Trump return to the White House, Bagger said that every European capital was carefully monitoring the US elections and that a "reflection process" was going on "behind closed doors".

POLICY

Beijing boosts leadership in emergency responses



Emergency workers drain the floodwaters that immersed a section of the city of Changsha in Hunan province last week. Photo: Reuters

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Beijing has boosted its leadership in emergency responses as large swathes of the country continue to battle heavy rainfall and drought, with more extreme weather forecast in the coming months.

Under a revised Emergency Response Law adopted on Friday, there will be stronger central mechanisms on warning, reporting and handling "natural disasters, serious accidents, public health or public safety incidents".

"In accordance with the principles of centralised management [and] unified allocation", the state would also improve the distribution system of relief materials and improve energy security to ensure supply in areas affected by emergencies, according to the revised law.

The revision, passed by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), the top legislative body, takes effect in November.

Maximum penalties for anyone failing to fulfil their legal responsibilities during emergencies will increase fivefold under the revised law – from 200,000 yuan (HK$214,000) to 1 million yuan.

The revision was prompted by China's experience with Covid-19, an NPC spokesman said earlier.

The country has grappled with extreme weather in recent months, as downpours in some regions and drought-like conditions in others take a toll on lives and the economy, especially the agriculture sector.

The south in particular has been hit by months of devastating rainfall, with dozens killed in one county in Guangdong province alone last week.

Yesterday, the National Meteorological Centre issued its highest rainfall warning under a four-tier system, as areas in four provinces in the south and south-east recorded 250mm to 322mm of rainfall within 24 hours.

The revision of the 2007 law was aimed at "improving the emergency response management and command systems, with the responsibilities of all parties clarified", state news agency Xinhua reported.

A newly added line highlighted the goal of an "enhanced, centralised, unified, efficient, and authoritative leadership system for emergency response work with Chinese characteristics".

Under the revised law, the building of centralised emergency resource reserves will be stepped up for efficient allocation, while the catalogue of reserves will be updated by departments under the State Council, the cabinet.

The country will also set up a comprehensive emergency warning platform, while media and telecoms and internet service providers should establish timely channels for releasing emergency information.

The amendment also strictly forbids any institution or individual from fabricating or spreading false information about emergencies, and requires the government to clarify any information that it becomes aware of "that may affect the stability of society".

Local governments should provide guidance to news media and support them with reporting and conducting public opinion supervision, while "news media should report on emergencies in a timely, accurate, objective and fair manner".

The clause has prompted concerns it may curb media reporting of natural disasters, as local governments usually herd reporters into press conferences and keep those affected or their relatives from speaking to the media, while sending officials to monitor and communicate with families.

FOCUS

Lee sets economic path despite global headwinds

After two years in the job, the chief executive believes the city is back on the right track, but anti-China rhetoric is likely to hurt the business community

Kahon Chan, Willa Wu and Natalie Wong

Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu has put stimulating the economy and improving livelihoods high on his agenda as he enters his third year in office.

Confident his administration had achieved "the turning point of the economy", he told the Post the influx of talent to the city also indicated it was on the right track.

A government source said tourism would be a priority for Lee among continuing efforts to revive the economy.

"What boosting tourism can accomplish is more visible, and it can translate to GDP growth more easily and create more job opportunities," the insider told the Post.

The source said that promoting tourism would also help improve the world's perception of Hong Kong as visitors experienced the city for themselves.

"They will realise that Hong Kong is safer, more vibrant and liberal than some Western media have portrayed it to be. You won't be arrested on the street for criticising the government."

By hosting mega events including major trade exhibitions and conventions, the government also hoped that "high value" visitors such as professionals and businesspeople would take home "good stories about Hong Kong", the insider added.

Lee took office in 2022, two years after Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law that drew sharp criticism from Western countries including the United States and Britain.



So we must start now for a result that will only be delivered 10 years later

WENDY HONG WEN, LAWMAKER

Harsh Covid-19 pandemic restrictions still in place meant visitors arriving in the city had to spend a week in quarantine in a hotel. The political landscape had also been reshaped following Beijing's overhaul of the electoral system to ensure only "patriots" ruled Hong Kong.

Two years on, much has changed. The borders have been reopened, Lee's administration has rolled out various livelihood measures such as a new type of interim rental housing, and a long-delayed domestic national security law required under the Basic Law, Hong Kong's mini-constitution, has been put in place.

The city's gross domestic product (GDP) has improved during his term, reversing from a 3.7 per cent contraction to a forecast of between 2.5 per cent and 3.5 per cent growth this year.

Two issues that can impact Lee's hopes for the economy are the mainland's slowing growth and the effect of geopolitics, specifically anti-Chinese sentiment in the West.

Jewellery manufacturer Ricky Lam has had first-hand experience of how geopolitics can affect a businessman in Hong Kong.

The chief executive of Elegance Jewellery International, a company set up in 1991, he has operations in Hong Kong and Shenzhen and makes jewellery for wholesalers and retailers.

After an American buyer suggested he should move his production line away from the mainland to secure future orders, Lam spent months travelling through Southeast Asia scouting for a new site.

"He feared more tariffs would be imposed on made-in-China products given the current state of geopolitics and the uncertainty brought by the US presidential election," said Lam.

As the months passed, it became clear the US presidential election would be a rematch between incumbent President Joe Biden and the man he defeated in 2020, Donald Trump.

The Biden administration has maintained a hard position on Beijing, but it was Trump who fired the first shot in the US-China trade war during his term in office and has threatened to be even tougher on China if he becomes president again.

Lam eventually settled on a site in Thailand for his factory, only to be disappointed when his American buyer refused to sign a contract and offered no reasons.

Lam decided to keep his factory on the mainland. "The US client later told me to expect fewer orders from him as he feared tariffs would rise further if Donald Trump was elected," he said.

Jackson Leung Siu-yin, vice-president of the Chinese Manufacturers' Association of Hong Kong, said the city's manufacturers had always emphasised the European and American markets.

"But geopolitics has greatly influenced market sentiments in the past few years. Hong Kong manufacturers have generally suffered a 20 to 30 per cent loss in business with Europe," he said.

Johannes Hack, president of the German Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong, said geopolitics and Hong Kong's "focus on security" had coloured the views of German firms' stakeholders based in Europe, making it harder to draw visitors and investments into the city.

He felt Hong Kong's focus on hosting big events to bring in targeted groups of visitors was helping.

"The German businesspeople and tourists who do come to the city leave with mostly very positive impressions. So anything that supports those activities will support Hong Kong's image," he said.

"For the rest, it may be a case of least said, soonest mended."

Attendance at most of the city's annual fairs – many of which are included in the Lee administration's "mega events" drive – has yet to return to the levels of 2018, before Hong Kong was affected first by social unrest and then the pandemic.

A check by the Post found that at least 11 of the 32 annual conventions and exhibitions held in the first half of 2024 saw lower visitor numbers than in 2018.

Hong Kong's post-pandemic recovery has been slow and uneven. In the first three months of 2024, GDP increased 2.7 per cent from a year before. But, adjusted for inflation, that was 0.5 per cent below growth in the first quarter of 2019.

Business receipts, which track revenues of different sectors, showed insurance and banking doing best in the first quarter, growing 21.1 per cent and 24.2 per cent respectively when compared to the same period five years ago.

But receipts for the accommodation, retail and food services sectors declined 5.9, 21 and 10.4 per cent respectively from the same quarter in 2019. In the first four months of 2024, 14.6 million visitors arrived in Hong Kong, 30.1 per cent lower than during the same period in 2018.

The city also witnessed a brain drain after Beijing imposed the national security law in 2020.

As of March this year, 144,400 Hongkongers had moved to Britain through a new migration pathway, while others headed to Australia and Canada, which also offered migration schemes specific to the city's residents.

But various talent schemes resulted in more than 110,000 people moving into the city since December 2022, most coming from the mainland.

Lawmaker Wendy Hong Wen said the government should be given time and space as it took a more proactive approach to economic development.

But the former researcher at the government's now-defunct Central Policy Unit questioned banking on tourism for a boost.

She said while more than 65 million visitors arrived in 2018, inbound tourism contributed only 3.6 per cent of added value to that year's GDP. It also created problems, including threatening the survival of small shops frequented by locals when retail chains popular with mainland visitors began moving into some neighbourhoods as rents surged.

Hong said most of the 98,300 job opportunities added by inbound tourism that year were also low-skilled and lowly paid, with poor prospects.

Instead of focusing on tourism, she called for industrial policies that tap into the international capital attracted to Hong Kong by its financial markets.

"You must look ahead," she said, lamenting that Hong Kong seemed to lack the ability to plan long-term and anticipate the consequences of actions taken.

Geopolitics has greatly influenced market sentiments in the past few years

JACKSON LEUNG, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE CHINESE MANUFACTURERS' ASSOCIATION OF HONG KONG

"Planting a tree today won't get you anything tomorrow, as the outcome can only be seen 10 years later," she said. "So we must start now for a result that will only be delivered 10 years later, instead of leaving it to the government 10 years from now. That kind of thinking doesn't work."

For all that had changed during Lee's first two years, John Burns, honorary professor at the University of Hong Kong's department of politics and public administration, said the government would be fooling itself if it thought local political problems had been settled.

Although calm had been restored in the city, he pointed out that polls indicated "clear and stark" polarisation among Hongkongers.

In a survey conducted by the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute in May, 38.6 per cent of 676 respondents said they did not trust the government, up from 31.1 per cent in July 2022.

Those who said they trusted the government made up 47.1 per cent of respondents, almost unchanged from two years ago.

"This situation is a recipe for instability," Burns said. He believed Hong Kong still had some good stories to tell about its soft power, such as the protection of ethnic and sexual minorities, popular culture and other things young people cared about.

"Instead, authorities led by the police blast out wolf-warrior messages that drown out everything else," he said. "The result is that Hong Kong's soft power chokes and withers."

But Lau Siu-kai, a consultant for the semi-official think tank the Chinese Association of Hong Kong and Macau Studies, said if Lee succeeded in turning the economy around, Beijing would see it as proof to the world that "patriots ruling Hong Kong" worked.

He recommended establishing ties with more non-Western countries by working with Beijing to channel more capital from new partners.

"No matter who will be the next US president, the anti-China sentiment will stay, which means one should not expect the US and Western countries to welcome Lee for visits in the remainder of his term," Lau said.

The chief executive said last week that aside from developing the local economy and improving people's livelihoods he also aimed to improve Hong Kong's existing advantages and look for new areas of growth and opportunities overseas and on the mainland.

Subject to US sanctions since August 2020, he made only one foreign visit during his second year in office, a trip last July to Singapore, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur to explore opportunities in Southeast Asia. His colleagues, however, had also been dispatched to several countries in the past two years.

It is understood Lee will visit Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia at the end of July.

In November, he will attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum summit in Peru. Financial Secretary Paul Chan Mo-po represented the city at last year's meeting in San Francisco.

Lee told the Post the South American country might be an "easy place" to promote Hong Kong as it had not been a geopolitical battleground, and city authorities had prepared "a very good information campaign".

While Hong Kong had to defend itself when attacked, he said his priority was to make more friends and tell people what the city was capable of.

Europe remained a place to focus on as there was potential for cooperation in economic development, and he said he was considering opening more economic offices in Southeast Asia.

The government insider said there was no plan for a large-scale branding campaign overseas, especially with US politicians likely to sharpen their anti-China rhetoric during the election cycle.



Let's be honest and pragmatic, Hong Kong's advantages are all about our ties with the West

ANTHONY CHEUNG, EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

"Regardless of what we do, negative narratives from Western governments and media criticising Hong Kong's human rights situation will continue," the source said.

Anthony Cheung Bing-leung, an adviser in public administration at Education University's Asian and policy studies department, recognised there was a limit to what the government could do in the face of the "all-around" Western media bias against Hong Kong. At the same time, he stressed there was no giving up on internationalism.

"Let's be honest and pragmatic, Hong Kong's advantages are all about our ties with the West," said Cheung, a former transport minister.

As Beijing began to extend the olive branch to some European countries, he felt Hong Kong could play a role, given that it was "on better-speaking terms" with the West thanks to its language advantage and common law tradition.

Cheung said if the government wanted to highlight Hong Kong's uniqueness, its overall public discourse should shift from national security and patriotism, which he considered basic responsibilities that now deserved less airtime.

"If we achieve these but nothing else, Hong Kong is making no contribution to the country. Isn't Shanghai doing the same good job in national security?"

Lawmaker Hong lamented that Hong Kong bureaucrats lacked boldness to contemplate the country's long-term international interests from a higher level.

"Passively, we can put political correctness first and parrot whatever Beijing says, which will make us no different from other mainland cities. More actively, we can look at the country's overarching development strategy and priorities, and identify what it really needs."

Hong said Hong Kong could try to play a stabilising role in China's relationship with the West, and that would serve the interests of both the country and the city. "As a city under 'one country, two systems', Hong Kong should do things that other mainland cities are unsuitable for or unable to undertake," she said.



Illustration: Lau Ka-kuen



Chief Executive John Lee says he is looking for new areas of growth overseas and on the mainland.

14.6m

Number of visitors arriving in Hong Kong in the first four months of this year – 30.1 per cent lower than during the same period in 2018



Visitors gather at the waterfront in Tsim Sha Tsui. Tourism is a priority area in efforts to revive the economy. Photos: Jelly Tse, Sam Tsang

HONG KONG

POLITICS

Government slams criticism of city's religious freedoms

Authorities denounce 'slander' in a US report which downgraded rating over record on rights

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The government has hit out at a US report on religious freedom that downgraded the city's freedom of expression and belief.

Authorities said yesterday that they "rejected the slandering remarks" in the US State Department's Report on International Religious Freedom, which downgraded the city's rating "due to evidence that the broader crackdown on dissent has prompted some churches to self-censor sermons and curtail other religious activities".



Retired Cardinal Joseph Zen is facing trial on collusion charges.



[Religious groups] flew People's Republic of China flags ... to celebrate National Day

U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT REPORT

Religious groups in Hong Kong had faced government retaliation for taking part in social movements, according to the report which was published on Wednesday.

The report cited a paper by the US non-governmental organisation Freedom House, which downgraded Hong Kong's freedom of expression and belief rating from the highest score 4 in 2022 to 3 in 2023.

Each jurisdiction is awarded zero to 4 points for different rights indicators.

The report said the Falun Gong spiritual movement faced counterdemonstrations and harassment by groups with ties to the Chinese Communist Party, while the Hong Kong Taoist Association cancelled a scheduled parade after their request to hold the event was not approved.

The report also noted that Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun, the former Catholic bishop of Hong Kong and an "outspoken defender of civil rights", was still pending trial on suspicions of collusion with foreign forces.

Religious leaders also reported hosting more interfaith activities that were characterised as patriotic.

"Amid controversy among their members about separation of church and state, the Buddhist Association, Anglican Church and Muslim community flew People's Republic of China flags in September and October to celebrate [China's] National Day," the report said.

"Religious leaders made statements about the role of religion in supporting the government and promoting patriotism and national prosperity."

In response, a Hong Kong government spokesman said it rejected the US' repeated attempts to slander the city "under the guise of religious freedom by piling up false stories and fabricated narratives".

"As always, Hong Kong residents enjoy the rights and freedoms, including religious freedom and the freedom of speech, under the Basic Law, the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance and other relevant laws," he said.

"The law enforcement agencies ... have been taking law enforcement actions based on evidence and strictly in accordance with the law ... such actions have nothing to do with ... political stance, background or occupation."

The spokesman also stressed that the Hong Kong judiciary would not handle cases differently because of the background of the person involved.

"The government strongly urges the US to immediately stop acting against the international law and basic norms of international relations and interfering in Hong Kong matters, which are purely China's internal affairs," he said.

Classically trained



Sixty musicians from the Hong Kong Youth Symphony Orchestra stage a flash mob performance at the West Kowloon high-speed rail terminal yesterday. The players performed "My Chinese Heart", "Below the Lion Rock" and "The Pearl of the Orient" to celebrate tomorrow's 27th anniversary of the city's return to Chinese rule. Photo: Xiaomei Chen

SCIENCE

Funding promised for space researchers

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Hong Kong will offer funding to support local research teams taking part in national space missions, with the first astronaut from the city set to begin her training in Beijing.

Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry Sun Dong said yesterday that the Hongkonger – a policewoman who previously worked in the force's secret technical services division – would soon begin her preparations to serve as a payload specialist in the country's space programme.

Sun said the astronaut would engage in science outreach activities for young people while in space, in addition to her regular work operating instruments and conducting experiments.

He added that the government intended to allocate targeted funding to support researchers to engage in national space exploration initiatives, such as the development of autonomous navigation robots.

"There are many coming Mars and lunar exploration missions. Several universities in Hong Kong are actively engaged in related research," Sun told a TV show.

"The government is exploring ways to provide special funding and resources to support these Hong Kong teams.

"This requires close discussions with local universities and the national space programme centre. The timeline is tight, as the next lunar mission is expected to be around 2027 to 2028."

The identity of the city's first astronaut has remained undisclosed in accordance with established rules.

The Hongkonger was among 10 chosen in the latest group of astronauts, which also included a Macau resident, the China Manned Space Agency said.

The agency also said the group would soon enter the China Astronaut Research and Training Centre to begin preparing for space missions.

Last month, the Post reported that the Hong Kong policewoman, a chief inspector holding a doctorate, was chosen over more than 80 hopefuls from the city.

She previously worked in the force's secret technical services before being transferred to the Security Bureau.

In October 2022, Beijing's space agency said that it was looking for two payload specialists for its fourth astronaut intake, with recruitment being extended to Hong Kong and Macau for the first time.

The selection process included a three-week recruitment drive, with 14 spots available.

SOCIETY

Weatherman turns rapper with environmental beat

Sammy Heung and Ezra Cheung

Veteran weatherman Lam Chiu-ying has long been a familiar face raising awareness in the city about climate change and telling people to stop using air conditioners.

Now, at 74, he has gained new attention as a rapper, using Cantonese hip-hop music to press home a message on environmental protection and overconsumption.

The former director of the Observatory teamed up with singer-songwriter Luna Lee Chui-ting, 29, known to fans as "Luna Is A Bep", to create a snappy number titled "Buy Less Buy Better".

For their music video, which premiered on YouTube on June 5, Lam shed his standard white shirt and grey trousers to don sunglasses and a retro-style shirt and jacket.

And for his debut as a rap artist, he called himself "Chiu-ying Gor", meaning "Brother" Chiu-ying.

The song has a serious message about fast fashion and wasteful overspending on cheap, trendy and mass-produced clothes.

Lam and Lee chose the theme to highlight that fashion was the world's third-most polluting industry, with carbon emissions accounting for 8 per cent of the global total.

"It is a significant contribution to the deteriorating climate, and it is fast growing," Lam said.

With the repeated catchphrase "buy less, buy better", the 2½-minute video has garnered 31,466 views and 1,900 likes as of last night.

Musician Lee hoped the song would remind people to shop wisely and support local businesses instead of blindly following fashion trends.

Her lyrics go: "I choose class over craze. Smart spending saves the day. Cheap clothes rarely look good, you don't even have to say it, I'd know."

She hoped people would opt for locally made, better quality clothes that lasted longer.

"There is a lower carbon footprint and it's good for the environment," she said.

One viewer said in the comments section: "Thank you for your contribution to the world. However small this step may seem, changes are possible as long as you believe."

Lam said he was "over the moon" when he was invited to collaborate with Lee, whose songs focus on social issues including the Covid-19 pandemic, capitalism and smartphone addiction.

He said it was not easy getting the hang of rapping, and thanked Lee for her "love, tolerance and forgiveness". But she praised her partner, saying: "Chiu-ying Gor is also a very clever man and [revealed] so much wisdom in our conversations and interaction."



Former director of Hong Kong Observatory Lam Chiu-ying with rapper "Luna Is A Bep" at her studio in Kwun Tong. Photo: Jonathan Wong

Lam led the Observatory from 2003 to 2009, and was chairman of the government-appointed Environmental Campaign Committee between 2013 and 2018.

During his 35-year career, he helped establish the "very hot weather" and "cold weather" warnings, and set up the Friends of the Observatory platform for the sake of public education and to promote science.

In 2008, an asteroid was named after him in recognition of his efforts to raise public awareness of climate change.

Well-known for his abhorrence of air conditioners, he has been dubbed by conservationists as the face of the city's environmental protection movement.

The city spends about HK$10 billion on air conditioning annually, which amounts to 30 per cent of the overall electricity consumption, according to official data.

The city experienced its hottest summer on record last year, when the temperature hit an average of 29.7 degrees Celsius between June and August.

On June 21 this year, the city recorded the temperature of 34 degrees, making it the hottest summer solstice since 1980.

Lam said that over the past couple of years, people kept needling him, asking whether he had given up the fight and "secretly switched on the air conditioner".

"Some said: 'Since you do not switch on the air conditioner, I will switch it on and turn the temperature a few degrees down,'" he told the Post, adding that he knew they were just having a bit of fun.

"People understand why I don't switch on the air conditioner."

That was why Lee added a verse to the song that caught the internet's attention: "Stop asking whether I have switched on my air conditioner. I will tell you when I have switched it on."

As an internet influencer, Lam has shared his views on environmental policies, including the government's waste-charging scheme which was shelved last month.

"If you are not paying now, you will pay for it later by suffering from the heat," he warned.

Blaming the government's publicity strategy for the failure to press ahead with the scheme, he said: "Changing people's habits is very difficult. But if we reason it out and convey the message in a way people understand, we can do it."

Lam said working with Lee on the rap song and video gave him new hope for the city's younger generation.

"People of my generation tend to see young people like this – they don't work, they just play around," he said. "But that is a totally wrong perspective. They really want to change the world in one way or another."

ENVIRONMENT

CLEAN UP CALL FOR BIG EVENT ORGANISERS

Piles of trash accumulate at mega occasions when much can be recycled, environmentalists say, as they urge city to promote 'zero-waste' gatherings

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Environmentalists want authorities to do more to encourage organisers of large events to clean up after themselves and recycle waste.

Sports competitions, music galas and international summits are part of the government's plan to boost the economy with mega events, but they produce tonnes of plastic, glass and other trash.

Currently, event organisers applying for government support do not have to promise to reduce waste or recover recyclable products – something environment advocates hope will change.

They suggest the government includes specific clauses in funding application forms to cover waste reduction and promote recycling at mega events.

"Waste reduction concerns every aspect of society," said Tom Ng Hon-lam, a Greenpeace campaigner. "When the government is paying so much attention to mega events, it shouldn't omit green initiatives in such activities."

Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu said last month that more than 210 mega events lined up for this year were expected to bring in about 1.7 million visitors, contributing HK$4.3 billion to the economy. They include the ComplexCon pop culture event held in March, the S2O Hong Kong Songkran Music Festival earlier this month, and October's Wine and Dine Festival.

Each major event can receive up to HK$15 million in government support from a dedicated fund overseen by a nine-member committee. Two events that received the maximum support were ComplexCon and Art Basel, held at AsiaWorld-Expo and the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre respectively.

A check of the government website shows the online application form for funding makes no mention of waste and carbon reduction.

The Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau confirmed there was no such requirement, and its spokesman did not say whether the committee overseeing the fund would add green initiatives.

A committee member told the Post it had never formally discussed including environmental obligations to the assessment criteria.

Some big events are mindful about waste and recycling.

Organisers of the Stanley International Dragon Boat Championships on June 10 teamed up with environmental group The Green Earth to set up five booths to collect recyclable trash. Thomas Chan Ting-hin, the NGO's environmental affairs officer, said it collected 108.5kg of plastic bottles, 76kg of cans, 146kg of glass bottles and 3kg of drink cartons.

He said that adding requirements for mega events would be a "win-win situation" to raise awareness and reduce waste. Chan said the city had not promoted "zero-waste events" and as a result piles of trash were seen after many outdoor events.

"I don't want everyone to think it is all right to leave behind loads of waste overflowing from garbage bins. It is necessary for the government to improve this image."

He said at least half the trash from a sports event with a crowd of 10,000 could be recovered if recycling facilities were available.

If the authorities made it a requirement to clean up and recycle, he added, more organisers would offer recycling services.

The Environmental Protection Department said it published a guidebook in 2018 to tell event organisers about reducing waste.

3.8

Tonnes of trash that the Conservancy Association said the group recycled from the Hong Kong Marathon in January

Among other recommendations, it suggests minimising the use of unnecessary materials, avoiding single-use products and recycling waste when possible.

A spokesman said the department had been in close contact with the Tourism Board and other event organisers, "providing useful advice and green tips".

The board said it had introduced a number of green policies for its mega events, including offering bottle fillers and recycling bins, adopting e-tickets and partnering with non-profit organisations to collect used glass bottles.

Sustainability practices were also a consideration in evaluating service providers for mega events, including logistics, catering and sanitation, a spokesman added.

Roy Ng Hei-man, a campaign officer for the Conservancy Association, said the group recycled more than 3.8 tonnes of trash from the Hong Kong Marathon in January. He said the types of waste expected at big events, such as plastic bottles and food scraps, made them easier to handle once properly sorted and cleaned.

He advised event organisers to liaise early with partners responsible for waste recycling, and set up recycling zones and bins.

"A green image can be a way to build up a good impression of Hong Kong internationally."

CRIME

Mother held for allegedly abandoning daughter

Olga Wong and Lo Hoi-ying

A 31-year-old mother has been arrested for allegedly abandoning her daughter at a playground.

Police detained the woman yesterday after receiving a report the previous night over a two-year-old girl found alone at Sai Yee Street Children's Playground in Mong Kok.

According to a source, the mother is a Hong Kong resident and a suspected drug addict.

The mother said under police caution that she had left her daughter in the care of a friend but was unable to provide any further information.

A woman noticed the girl playing alone at the playground on Friday evening at around 7pm and spent half an hour looking for her parents but to no avail.

She then brought the girl to the Mong Kok Police Station to make a report, but the girl was unable to reveal any information about herself.

She was taken to Kwong Wah Hospital in Yau Ma Tei and preliminary checks showed she was in healthy condition with no injuries.

The force issued an announcement at 2.23am with details of the girl to locate her next of kin, as she was not carrying an identity document. The mother was arrested at 4am yesterday when she went to Mong Kok Police Station in search of her daughter.

Police detained her on suspicion of ill-treatment or neglect of a child in her care.

CHINA

Taiwan ... is a much better destination for Indian workers compared to most places they go for migrant labour

SAMEER LALWANI, OF THE UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE'S ASIA CENTRE, ON INDIAN CITIZENS HELPING TO PLUG A STUBBORN LABOUR SHORTAGE SPAWNED BY THE SELF-RULED ISLAND'S LOW BIRTH RATE > CHINA A7

ECONOMY

PROPERTY SLOWDOWN SPILLOVER 'UNLIKELY'

Analysts say it is doubtful crisis in the housing sector will affect other financial markets despite concerns raised by US House committee meeting

Ralph Jennings and **Amanda Lee**

A bond default or prolonged financial stress on local governments weakened by China's property market slowdown would have a downstream effect on resident foreign companies, according to projections – and in a worst-case scenario, spread across borders to other financial markets.

But neither was particularly likely, observers said, because the problem was festering largely inside China's borders and the central government was testing a range of solutions.

Questions over a potential overseas spillover from China's years-long property crisis became more pointed after a US House of Representatives committee meeting this week, where congresswoman Katie Porter likened the situation to the global financial crisis of 2007 and 2008.

The collapse of highly leveraged debt-backed financial instruments, particularly those in the US which packaged subprime mortgages and other risky assets, sparked that economic conflagration.



The banks are in the firing line for local government debt problems

CHRISTOPHER BEDDOR, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF CHINA RESEARCH, GAVEKAL DRAGONOMICS, HONG KONG

In China, meanwhile, rules passed to stem housing speculation and overcapitalisation on the part of developers have sparked defaults and thrown property values into disarray. Widespread delinquency could trigger a liquidity crisis known as a "grey rhino" – big and obvious, but neglected until it is too late to stop.

As local governments in some areas of China – often the far northeast and parts of the southwest – are collecting less revenue from land sales due to the property slump, they will have less money for investment in large infrastructure projects. This would, in turn, cramp jobs, consumption and retail further, analysts said.

American brands such as KFC and Starbucks operate in many urban Chinese shopping districts alongside European fashion retailers such as Dior and Zara – and hesitant consumption is already a hallmark of China's uneven post-pandemic recovery.

"Though a financial or debt crisis is nearly impossible, local government financing stress could affect local economies in a very negative way," said Liang Yan, chair professor of economics at Willamette University in the US state of Oregon.

That stress, Liang said, reduced infrastructure outlays, social programme spending and help for local businesses. "All these could weaken local economies, including foreign businesses, directly in reduced support and indirectly as impaired consumer demand," she said.

Domestic banks, including the four largest state-owned institutions, might take a hit if local governments needed them for debt restructuring, one researcher said. Many of the top banks trade publicly on the internationalised Hong Kong stock exchange.

"The banks are in the firing line for local government debt problems," said Christopher Beddor, deputy director of China research at Gavekal Dragonomics in Hong Kong.

"If a local government financing vehicle [LGFV] encounters debt distress, among the very first things that local officials will do is lean on banks to restructure loans to the vehicle," he said. "This practice impacts the earnings and equity of nearly all the banks, including the 'big four'."

A bond default by a LGFV – a company that borrows in the name of a locality, mostly for infrastructure – would risk "financial contagion" if capital markets in turn blocked other vehicles and state-owned enterprises, Beddor said. "If that happened, there would absolutely be some panic selling because the government guarantee would be abruptly undermined."

The International Monetary Fund estimates that the total debt of those vehicles rose to a record 66 trillion yuan (HK$70.94 trillion) in 2023, equivalent to half of the country's economy.

But analysts say severe spillover scenarios are unlikely.

From an overseas perspective, default risks were low because onshore debt was semipublic and denominated in yuan, while the offshore debt of US$33 billion that would mature this year was "a very small amount", Liang said. The weakest 10 Chinese provinces accounted for at most 18 per cent of LGFV debt, and "only a small portion of the debt needs some form of restructuring", she added.

The central government already launched a partial bailout of LGFVs last year to reduce the risk of a destabilising default.

Since last year, local governments have been allowed to swap high-interest debt with lower-interest bonds. Attempts have also been made to control the amount of new debt local vehicles are allowed to take out.

Individual offshore investors say they are not worried about a spillover – if they are thinking about it at all.

Lan Foan, the minister of finance, reassured markets in March that local government debt risks remained "under control" and that "coordinated efforts" had led to an overall alleviation of the situation.

Financial markets had priced in property downturn risks and central government measures had been effective in preventing any large-scale defaults, said Clifford Lau, a Singapore-based currency portfolio manager at William Blair.

Jeff Bowman, the chief executive officer of US-based materials science firm Cocona, visited China in May to meet several customers. He said none mentioned problems getting loans and that two "proudly showed off" recent, "large" capital investments.

Cocona makes a sweat-drying additive for yarn, and about half of it is shipped to Chinese spinners. About a quarter of the firm's annual revenues, US$10 million to US$20 million, comes from China.



Residential buildings in Shanghai. The country's property crisis has led to local governments collecting less revenue. Photo: Bloomberg

Let it slide



Visitors ride one of the giant slides yesterday at Longcheng Happy Water World in Chengde, Hebei province in the country's north. The amusement park is part of a nationwide chain of attractions that feature aquatic installations and activities. Photo: Getty Images

POLITICS

Fighter jet engineer made Jilin party boss

Huang Qiang one of growing cohort promoted for technological know-how

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Fighter jet engineer Huang Qiang has been promoted to Communist Party boss of Jilin province in the latest reshuffle of regional party chiefs.

The 61-year-old was promoted from governor of Sichuan and replaces Jing Junhai, whose next position has not been announced.

The appointment came after the Politburo set ambitious economic and tech development goals for the next decade in a meeting on Thursday.

Over the past few years, more scientists and engineers have been appointed to key positions at provincial level to sharpen the country's technological edge and counter the US-led technological squeeze.

The officials are expected to bring expertise in areas such as rocket science, nuclear power and environmental protection.

Huang belongs to a group of rising political stars with backgrounds in science and engineering.

Born in Zhejiang province, he is a senior engineer with a doctorate in management science and engineering from Northwestern Polytechnical University.

Huang's career took off at the Aviation Industry Corporation of China, where he held several technical and managerial positions. In 2008, he became deputy director of the State Administration of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence.

He is well known as a warplane designer, particularly for his work on the navigation and fire control systems of the Xian JH-7, a two-seater fighter-bomber nicknamed the "Flying Leopard".

In 2014, Huang was promoted to deputy governor of Gansu province before taking up the same position in Henan province four years later, assuming responsibility for economic development and administrative efficiency.



Huang Qiang is promoted from governor of Sichuan province.

Over the past four years, Huang has served as the deputy party secretary of Sichuan.

Other new appointments include the transfer of Liang Yanshun, 61, to serve as party secretary of Anhui province, where he will succeed Han Jun, who will take over as party head of the agriculture ministry.

Liang has a doctorate in economics from the Central Party School and worked there for many years in administrative and research roles before going to Gansu province for two years from 2016 to head the propaganda and organisation departments.

In 2017, Liang returned to Beijing, taking on responsibilities for party building, united front work and propaganda for various central leading groups. From 2022 to 2024, Liang worked as the party secretary of Ningxia.

Meanwhile, Li Yifei, 60, was promoted to party chief of Ningxia, moving from Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region in the west where he was deputy party boss. Li, originally from Yunnan, has served in key positions across three provinces: Yunnan, Guizhou and Xinjiang.

In October 2021, Li was promoted to secretary of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps party committee and officially ranked as a senior leader, responsible for overseeing economic and social development.

CEO creates her dream family with US sperm

Make-up mogul picks mixed-heritage donor with Ivy League degree to father four children

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An online influencer and chief executive officer of a cosmetics brand has intrigued her 9 million followers on Douyin by her decision to have four children using sperm she bought from the United States.

Ye Haiyang, 36, was born to a working-class family in Jilin province. At the age of 22 she founded her Shenzhen-based make-up company, DC Expert. After she built her company factory in 2015, the single entrepreneur asked herself: "What's the point of working hard and making money?"

Her answer was to have a child. But instead of marrying and getting pregnant, Ye decided to buy "high-quality" sperm from a US bank. She chose what she considered to be the best, as it belongs to a man with a mixed heritage who is healthy and physically strong as well as having a degree from an Ivy League college.

Ye said she spent 500,000 yuan (HK$537,000) to give birth to her first daughter, Doris, in the US in 2017. In 2021, she went to Russia for another IVF procedure using the same man's sperm, and gave birth to daughter Hatti in 2022.

On June 20, Ye announced on Douyin she had given birth to twin sons, Owen and Olsen, again with the same man's sperm. She said they were everything she dreamed about when she was a teenager.

Ye faced many questions and doubts when she had Doris, but more supportive voices emerged as she became a mother of four. Many said she "set an example" for them. One person said: "You have daughters and sons, money, and no husband or annoying mother-in-law. So happy."

China has been relaxing its birth registration policy since last year. Sichuan province officially published new regulations in February last year that allows children born out of wedlock to be registered in one parent's hukou. Hukou, or permanent residence permit, gives access to basic social benefits, including education and medical care. Mainland law does not grant single women access to sperm banks in China, so some buy from abroad.

In one video, Ye said she did not want to get married only because society believed children needed a father. She said she can be both their mother and father: "I can be their hero," she said.

Of her choice to have four children, Ye said: "People say your love for each kid will reduce when you have more, but my love for them only multiplied."



Entrepreneur Ye Haiyang is the mother of four children by IVF.

SCIENCE

Robot with stem cells 'may advance computing'

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Scientists have developed a robot with an artificial brain that can be taught to perform various tasks.

The brain-on-chip technology developed by researchers at Tianjin University and the Southern University of Science and Technology combines a brain organoid – a tissue derived from human stem cells – with a neural interface chip to power the robot and teach it to avoid obstacles and grip objects.

The technology is an emerging branch of brain-computer interfaces (BCI), which aims to combine the brain's electrical signals with external computing power and which the country has made a priority.

It is "the world's first open-source brain-on-chip intelligent complex information interaction system" and could lead to the development of brain-like computing, according to Tianjin University.

"[This] is a technology that uses an in-vitro cultured 'brain' – such as brain organoids – coupled with an electrode chip to form a brain-on-chip", which encoded and decoded stimulation feedback, Ming Dong, vice-president of Tianjin University, told the Science and Technology Daily.

BCI technology has gained widespread attention because of the Elon Musk-backed Neuralink, an implantable interface designed to let patients control devices with only their thoughts.

Tianjin University said its research could lead to the development of hybrid human-robot intelligence.

Brain organoids are made from human pluripotent stem cells typically only found in early embryos that can develop into different kinds of tissues, including neural tissues.

When grafted into the brain, they could establish functional connections with the host brain, the Tianjin University team wrote in an unedited manuscript published in the peer-reviewed Oxford University Press journal Brain last month.

"The transplant of human brain organoids into living brains is a novel method for advancing organoid development and function. Organoid grafts have a host-derived functional vasculature system and exhibit advanced maturation," the team wrote.

Li Xiaohong, a professor at Tianjin University, told Science and Technology Daily that while brain organoids were regarded as the most promising model of basic intelligence, the technology still faced "bottlenecks such as low developmental maturity and insufficient nutrient supply".

In the paper, the team said it had developed a technique to use low-intensity ultrasound, which could help organoids better integrate and grow within the brain.

The team found that when grafts were treated with low-intensity ultrasound, it improved the differentiation of organoid cells into neurons and helped improve the networks it formed with the host brain.

The technique could also lead to new treatments to treat neurodevelopmental disorders and repair damage to the cerebral cortex, the paper said.

"Brain organoid transplants are considered a promising strategy for restoring brain function by replacing lost neurons and reconstructing neural circuits," the team wrote.

The team found that using low-intensity ultrasound on implanted brain organoids could ameliorate neuropathological defects in a test on a mouse model of microcephaly – a neurodevelopmental disorder characterised by reduced brain and head size.

The university also said the team's use of non-invasive low-intensity ultrasound treatment could help neural networks form and mature, providing a better foundation for computing.

In the slow lane



A worker transports share bikes to a tourist destination in downtown Beijing yesterday. About 300,000 such bicycles are available in the capital through the use of mobile apps.

The most popular brands are Meituan Bike in yellow, Didi Bike in green and Hello Bike in blue, with popular cycling routes available for tourists to explore the city at a leisurely pace. Photo: AP

TOURISM

MAINLANDERS FLOCK TO SOUTH KOREA IN DROVES

Visitor numbers have surged this year with travellers from China drawn to sites linked to K-pop stars BTS and television series 'Welcome to Samdal-ri'

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South Korean boy band BTS make so little secret of their trips to Jeju, a resort island in their homeland, that travel agencies know just what spots the seven superstars have visited.

That makes it easy to organise tours for Chinese fans to take photos, with a hotel and a Buddhist temple some of the stops on the itinerary.

It is the same for Chinese viewers of Korean television series *Welcome to Samdal-ri*, which was filmed on the volcanic island.

Travel policies are helping too, as Chinese nationals qualify for visa-free entry to South Korea for up to 30 days if in transit to a third country.

The number of Chinese tourists travelling to Jeju has expanded every month from January to April this year, with the combined total for the four months more than all of 2023, according to the Jeju Tourism Organisation.

Chinese tourism increased by 470 per cent from January to April this year compared to the same months of 2023, the Korea Times reported. As of the first quarter, Chinese visitors had made more than 1 million trips to South Korea, more than from any other country, according to Xinhu.

South Korea had already become the second most popular foreign market for Chinese tourists last year, after Japan, travel analytics firm ForwardKeys said.

Mindful of economic uncertainty at home, they can reach South Korea in a few hours on relatively cheap flights, said Gary Bowerman, director of the tourism marketing firm Check-in Asia.

Round-trip flights to Seoul, from Beijing or Shanghai, stood at around US$180 as of mid-June.

Chinese tourists typically visit historic sites in Seoul, while monuments to K-pop and Korean dramas are popular on Chinese video platforms.

Many frequent urban zones with shops, entertainment and dining – all near their hotels – said Wendy Jiao, a representative of Shenzhen-based hotel platform CNbooking.

"South Korea does offer a forcing mix of fast-moving pop culture, lifestyle, themed cafes and well-being, plus diverse landscapes … and of course cuisine," Bowerman said. "These factors, and its close proximity, continue to make it a well-suited destination for short-travel travel trips."

Halmurat, a 29-year-old Chinese national, visited South Korea for four days in February, and after a day of business meetings, visited a night market, the Itaewon nightlife quarter in Seoul and the Leeum Samsung Museum of Art.

"At three hours past midnight, I felt that [Seoul] was still full of people," said the Shanghai-based doctor. "You can't see this kind of scene in Shanghai."

Travel operators in the eastern coastal city of Busan were hoping for more direct flights from China to promote the beaches, railways and coastal temples it is known for, said William Cho, global marketing manager with the Busan Tourism Organisation.

He said flights arrive from just three Chinese cities, with tourists going to Busan only after visiting Seoul, and if they do not mind a train ride of more than two hours. "We are waiting for and wish to have more airlines," he said.

The boom followed the end of travel barriers that had disrupted tourism off and on for six years.

In 2017, China issued travel warnings to discourage trips to South Korea after it deployed a US-designed anti-ballistic missile defence system. Years later, the coronavirus hit tourism hard, and it was not until August when Chinese group travel resumed completely after Seoul lifted Covid testing rules on Chinese visitors.

Bowerman said 73 per cent of outbound travellers from China flew an average of four to five hours in the first quarter and "the vast majority" stayed abroad less than a week.

"You'll see more people being careful with their money and staying within the four-hour radius," Bowerman told a webinar in May.

Chinese travellers were stocking up on presales of flights and hotel rooms in South Korea as of mid-June, said Zhang Chen, of the Chinese travel platform Fliggy.

Additional reporting by Mia Nulimaimaiti



Tourists in a rapeseed field in Jeju, South Korea. More than a million Chinese visited the nation in the first quarter of 2024. Photo: Bloomberg

TAIWAN

Indian workers roped in to fill shortage

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A Taiwanese developer of personal computer power supplies may be ahead of its time.

AcBel Polytech, which was founded in 1981, has 7,000 employees, but recently the firm has attempted to boost their ranks by recruiting Indian students from Taiwanese universities.

"We try to bring other countries' talent to work with us, and India, why not?" assistant vice-president James Hsieh said on the sidelines of the Computex Taipei tech show earlier this month, with the company having been interviewing students on university campuses for at least the past year.

Taipei's Ministry of Labour signed a memorandum of understanding with India in February to allow its citizens to help plug a stubborn labour shortage spawned by Taiwan's low birth rate.

Media in Taiwan and India have said as many as 100,000 Indian nationals could eventually reach Taiwan to work in factories, on farms and in hospitals. India is also known for its tech talent.

But approval of a labour deal is still pending parliamentary approval in Taipei, and since the memo was signed, scepticism has arisen on both sides about how well Indian workers would adapt.

Taiwan's government said in September 2022 that it aimed to attract 400,000 more foreign workers by 2030 as employers fell short of applicants in tech, a sector that makes up about 30 per cent of the island's GDP.

The current legislative session is expected to end in mid-July, with lawmakers embroiled in a month-old dispute over a bill that increases the legislature's oversight powers.

And a ministry spokesman sees little chance of the labour deal with India being approved before the summer recess.

Taiwan had not fixed the number of workers it hoped to recruit from India, the spokesman said, while the Ministry of Labour did not have figures for the number of Indian workers employed in Taiwan.

"Taiwan's economic development level is a bit higher, so Taiwan has some attractiveness," said Fang Tien-sze, a professor and CEO of the Taiwan-India Research Association, a group of scholars and others with connections to India based in Taiwan.

"[But] Taiwan for Indians is an unknown place – they don't know what the language and culture are all about.

"For Taiwan, [more Indian labour] is an opportunity for study," Fang said, suggesting that an increased presence would allow locals to better understand Indians. "It would be good to increase inclusiveness."

But some Taiwanese might harbour "prejudices" towards India, he said.

Taipei's labour ministry apologised in March after comments by then-minister Hsu Ming-chun that her government would recruit workers from north-eastern India – because their skin colour and eating habits were similar to Taiwan's – drew sharp criticism from New Delhi.

An earlier statement from the Ministry of Labour about the cooperation deal said Indian workers had a "stable temperament" with the ability to work hard and achieve "fine reviews".

A larger presence of Indian professionals in Taiwan would deepen ties, said Sameer Lalwani, a South Asia expert with the US Institute of Peace's Asia Centre.

Taiwan has been actively chasing stronger trade, investment and economic relations in South and Southeast Asia for the past eight years to offset reliance on the mainland.

Taiwanese investment in India last year and in the first four months of this year combined reached US$5.6 billion, representing twice the total for all of 2021 and 2022, Department of Investment Review data showed.

"Among Indians, the West seems to be a more common and viable option to move for work," said Sana Hashmi, a fellow with the Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation in Taipei. "There is still a lack of familiarity with Taiwan and work opportunities among Indians."

Indians had been "plugging labour shortages" across the Persian Gulf for the past 50 years to support construction following the Middle East's oil boom, Lalwani said. Some migrant workers in the region had switched from blue-collar jobs to more skilled ones, he said.

But with India facing a domestic job shortage and labour surplus, Taiwan had become an attractive destination, he said.

"Because Taiwan is a highly developed democracy with high levels of political and civil liberties, along with high labour rights and safety conditions, it is a much better destination for Indian workers compared to most places they go for migrant labour," Lalwani said.

DEFENCE

Military drones offer market 'low-cost attractive options'

Hi-tech UAVs capable of surveillance and attack a major source of growth for China arms exports

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Chinese military drones could be "attractive options" for developing countries, with China's biggest arms contractor looking to expand beyond its traditional markets.

Earlier this month in Paris, Chinese weapons manufacturer North Industries Group Corporation (Norinco) showcased miniature versions of its land-based weapons and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) at the Eurosatory expo, one of Europe's biggest arms shows.

Norinco displayed various rotary and fixed-wing UAVs at its booth, including the Z-6B, an unmanned helicopter system based on the Z-6 helicopter from the 1960s, which can do vertical take-offs and landings, making it suitable for large naval platforms, such as aircraft carriers, amphibious ships and destroyers.

"The Z-6B features many technological innovations compared to the original Z-6," said Timothy Heath, a senior international defence researcher at the Rand Corporation think tank.

"In addition to being unmanned, it features improvements in stealth, advanced optical sensors, electromagnetic warfare, and attack capabilities.

"It is a multi-role platform capable of surveillance, targeting support, and anti-submarine warfare, among other missions."

Malcolm Davis, a senior analyst at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, said the Z-6B was "very reminiscent" of US defence contractor Northrop Grumman's MQ-8B Fire Scout, but with greater payload, a higher operational ceiling, and greater endurance.

"It's likely to be employed to support naval operations at sea, including ISR [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] communications support for targeting of over-the-horizon weapons, and perhaps logistics support, or from the shore, and clearly employs a degree of reduced radar cross section in its design," he said.

Norinco's emphasis on drones at the exhibition was a sign that military UAVs had become one of China's core military exports.

According to an arms transfer database from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), China was the world's fourth biggest arms exporter in 2023. However, its deliveries were mainly limited to developing countries in Africa and Asia, where Pakistan accounted for 61 per cent of total arms exports.

Drones have been a major source of growth for China's arms exports. The SIPRI database also showed that Beijing exported more than 280 combat drones over the past decade, mainly to the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia.

"The rapid development and export of low-cost military UAVs in the past few years, for applications such as surveillance and attack, has played a significant role in the growth of China's arms industry and is expected to continue in the future as well," said Nishant Kumar, a senior analyst for air platforms at global military intelligence company Janes.

Serbia is the only European country operating Chinese UAVs in its military. In 2020, Beijing delivered six Chinese-made CH-92A combat drones along with 18 FT-8C laser-guided missiles to Belgrade. Three years later, Serbia acquired Chinese CH-95 UAVs.

Mark Cozad, a senior defence researcher at Rand Corporation, said China had made drone technology a "national priority", and there had been significant growth in Chinese companies developing and marketing both commercial and military drones.



> **Overall, China has developed a wide array of technologically capable drones**
>
> MARK COZAD, RAND CORPORATION



A CH-95 Chinese UAV in service with the Serbian Air Force.

He said drones were an "important part" of China's arms industry, particularly in the sales to the Middle East and North Africa, providing a wide range of services and capabilities at lower costs compared to their Western counterparts.

"Overall, China has developed a wide array of technologically capable drones for use in both [commercial and military] areas," Cozad said. "Western systems cost significantly more for both purchases but also in terms of operations and maintenance costs. For customers … the low cost is a critical factor."

The Russian invasion of Ukraine highlighted the importance of military UAVs in modern warfare for their low cost and high efficiency, while reducing the risks of human casualties.

"This war shows that drones change everything … Now, Ukraine is producing FPV [first-person view] drones, medicines drones, [and] maritime drones," said Maksym Zaporozhets, international sales manager at drone manufacturer Ukrspec Systems, one of the Ukrainian companies showcasing products at Eurosatory.

UAVs were among the biggest drawcards of the advanced weapons systems at the show, with leading Western defence contractors also showcasing their drone technologies.

Outside the exhibition hall, Europe's largest aircraft maker, Airbus, promoted its rotary UAV, the VSR700, which is based on a twin-seat design from French helicopter maker Guimbal.

"We think it's a good solution because it has the qualities of a small helicopter … [but] you can carry quite a large payload. So you can imagine a lot of different mission sets," Airbus Helicopter's Emmanuel Huberdeau said, adding that his company aimed to deliver the system to the French navy by 2025.

Cozad said while it was unlikely that Chinese military drones would make many "inroads" into Europe because of issues such as "interoperability, security, reliability and dependence" on China, the "integral" role of UAVs in Ukraine would enhance Chinese units as "attractive options" for developing countries.

"As a part of foreign military sales, China provides attractive options to many militaries, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa. They provide good enough capabilities for a price that these militaries can afford and with little to no restrictions on their use," he said.

ENTERTAINMENT

Transgender actress in groundbreaking turn on British television comedy thriller

Iris Jiang

Actress Jaylin Ye has made history by becoming the first Chinese transgender female character to appear on British television with her debut in the Amazon Prime series *Dead Hot*.

The six-episode comedy thriller follows friends and amateur detectives Jess and Elliott as they investigate the disappearance of Peter, Jess' twin brother, and the love of Elliott's life.

Ye plays Karis, Elliott's college friend, who joins the team in the third episode.

Her performance has been praised as "downright hilarious" by reviewer Shannon Connellan on the global entertainment platform Mashable.

The series premiered in the UK and Ireland on March 1 and became available in the US and Canada on Tubi from March 27.

Last summer, Ye spent about six weeks filming in Liverpool, northwest England, for her first appearance in a television series.

This marks the first recorded instance of a Chinese transgender female character in a British television series.

The trailer, featuring Ye, even played on the big screen in New York's Times Square.

"As an immigrant, a Chinese and a trans woman, I feel that this step is historically significant, proving that people like us can reach the mainstream," Ye said.

"You're China's own Hunter Schafer," an online observer commented on Ye's post on Xiaohongshu.

"I love this show. You are fantastic in it," said another.

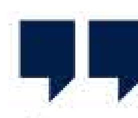
Ye, in her 20s, was born and raised in Guangdong province.

She earned dual bachelor's degrees in Chinese studies and graphic design at a mainland university.

From a young age, she sensed she was "somehow different" and was bullied for being a "sissy".

Ye, originally identifying as non-binary, later came out as a transgender female in August 2022. Commencing hormone therapy last year, she expressed gratitude to the supportive queer community in Britain.

Hormone therapy marks the beginning of one's journey towards gender transition and gender-affirming surgeries are not a prerequisite for individuals to be recognised as transgender.



> **As an immigrant, a Chinese and a trans woman, I feel that this step is historically significant**
>
> JAYLIN YE, ACTRESS



She said that embracing her female identity brought her immense confidence and comfort.

In 2018, Ye graduated from the University of Manchester with a master's degree in marketing and returned to Guangdong, where she worked at a local international school.

However, she soon realised it was not the life she wanted.

In November 2020, Ye seized an opportunity to move back to Manchester and worked in the fashion industry as a make-up artist and model.

Acting was initially just a hobby when she belonged to her university's drama club.

In 2021, she began taking weekly acting workshops and signed with her first agency.

"You need to stop daydreaming. You're not professionally trained and you do not look particularly good," her mother told her, like many East Asian parents, habitually dismissing her child's dreams despite her love.

"I told my mum that my face appeared on the big screen in Times Square. She asked, 'What is Times Square?'," Ye said.

Her achievements eventually got her mother's support, though her father still believed she should pursue a more stable career.

In March last year, with her natural humour, she secured the role of Karis in *Dead Hot* after just one audition.

The casting director later told her that her audition tape was the only one that made everyone laugh.

ASIA

> Singaporeans may be against the Russian invasion of Ukraine but they're not against Russian goods
>
> TOMMY KOH, AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE AT SINGAPORE'S MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, ON REPORTS RUSSIAN-MADE GOODS ARE FINDING THEIR WAY ONTO SINGAPORE'S VIRTUAL SUPERMARKET SHELVES

JAPAN

SECRET NUCLEAR WASTE TRANSFER ANGERS ACTIVISTS

Environmentalists slam shipment of 136 tonnes of radioactive material from Japan to US storage site close to tribal lands of indigenous peoples

Julian Ryall

Environmentalists in the United States and anti-nuclear campaigners in Japan have united to condemn the secret transfer of around 136 tonnes of nuclear waste from research facilities in Japan to a uranium storage site in the US state of Utah.

The Grand Canyon Trust, a conservation group headquartered in Flagstaff, Arizona, announced on June 11 that newly discovered documents had shown that Energy Fuels Inc had imported the waste from the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA), arriving on January 16.

The waste – uranium ore and ion-exchange resin with absorbed uranium – was shipped across the Pacific to the port of Everett, in Washington state, and taken by road to the Energy Fuels' uranium mill at White Mesa. The facility was already controversial as it is less than 2km from Bears Ears National Monument and close to the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe's ancestral lands.

In a statement provided to the Post, Tim Peterson, cultural landscapes director for the Grand Canyon Trust, said: "This latest shipment from Japan shifts the burden of Japan's radioactive legacy from Japanese citizens to the people of White Mesa.

"If the mill's operators are getting paid to receive this shipment from Japan, it's not for processing uranium, but for disposing of waste the Japanese people don't want near their communities.

"While the mill may extract a small amount of uranium from these materials, more than 99 per cent of them will likely end up buried in the waste pits at the White Mesa Mill along with the more than 700 million pounds [350,000 tonnes] of radioactive waste already there."

The US and Japanese companies have not revealed the amount paid to process and dispose of the waste, although the trust has confirmed that Japan paid the mill US$5.8 million in 2005 to take delivery of 500 tonnes of soil contaminated with radioactivity.

The transfer of the waste to the US has not been reported in the Japanese mainstream media.

"I was not aware of this waste being transported to the US and I think it runs counter to the policy of recycling nuclear waste in Japan," said Kazuto Suzuki, a professor of science and technology policy at the University of Tokyo.

> It is unacceptable to force Japan's radioactive waste onto indigenous peoples
>
> HAJIME MATSUKUBO, CNIC

"And I do not know why the Japanese media has not reported on this," he admitted. "It is the sort of story that a lot of media would love, but I think that there has been no official confirmation of the transfer means they are not willing to speculate about what is going on."

The waste was generated during research and development linked to Japanese uranium mining and related studies at the Tono Geoscience Centre in Gifu prefecture and the Ningyo-toge Environmental Engineering Centre in Okayama prefecture.

The plan calls for 99.5 per cent of the waste to be stored as slag in vast pits at the mill, according to the Citizens' Nuclear Information Centre (CNIC).

Hajime Matsukubo, secretary general of the Tokyo-based organisation, said there were no official statements or media coverage of the shipment leaving Japan and being unloaded in the US in January, although he conceded that security would have been a concern.

"The JAEA did not release any information about the transfer and the media here has insufficient knowledge of the issue," he said.

CNIC campaigns against nuclear energy in Japan, and Matsukubo said that highly radioactive waste that was generated there should not be dumped on communities in other parts of the world.

"Some of the uranium was imported into Japan for research and some originated here in Japan, but it was clearly used here, so we need to find a way to manage the waste that is left behind," he said.

"If the local people in Utah are willing to accept the waste, then that would be OK. But they are clearly not happy with this transfer, and that should be respected.

"It is absolutely unacceptable to force Japan's radioactive waste onto indigenous peoples who are already suffering from this issue. We strongly protest [against] this outrageous act by JAEA."

Members of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and local residents in White Mesa are planning to stage a "spiritual walk" to protest against the mill in October to express their concern that the facility has effectively become a dump for radioactive waste and that it threatens public health, water and air quality in the area.

The JAEA was contacted by the Post for comment.

In response to a general query from CNIC about plans to export radioactive waste in 2022, JAEA said: "In conducting overseas smelting, we will comply not only with the relevant laws and ordinances of Japan, but will also take into consideration the relevant environmental and social considerations as well as legal compliance in the local area when selecting contract partners."



The White Mesa Mill uranium facility in Utah has taken delivery of Japanese nuclear waste. Photo: Handout

A mobile tradition



Indonesians carry a *mikoshi*, or portable shrine, as they take part in Natsu Matsuri Japanese summer festival celebrations at a park in Jakarta, Indonesia, yesterday. Hundreds participated in the event, held to promote Japanese culture during the school holidays.

Natsu Matsuri is the general term for all the festivals and events that happen during Japan's summer season from June to August. With roots deeply embedded in history, these lively gatherings celebrate the country's rich cultural heritage. Photo: EPA

INDIA

Infrastructure failings spur Modi critics

Airport roof collapse latest to raise safety concerns about spending spree

Bloomberg

The deadly roof collapse at India's busiest airport is the latest in a string of recent infrastructure disasters in the country, raising safety questions as Prime Minister Narendra Modi spends billions of dollars to improve transport across the country.

Officials at Delhi's airport cancelled operations at Terminal 1 after an outdoor metal canopy collapsed during torrential rain on Friday. Multiple cars were crushed outside the airport, which was recently renovated, killing one person and injuring eight, according to authorities. The area recorded its heaviest one-day June rainfall in 88 years that day.

Several hundred kilometres east, in the state of Bihar, four bridges recently collapsed and a structure at an airport in central India caved in. With the start of the monsoon season, waterlogging is now the norm in many cities. In Ayodhya, the roof of a massive temple inaugurated by Modi this year has been leaking, and flooding has inundated newly built roads.

The issues cast a harsh spotlight on Modi's building spree, which officials are leaning on to boost development in the world's fastest-growing major economy.

According to Bloomberg Economics, 44.4 trillion rupees (HK$4.16 trillion) worth of new infrastructure will become operational over the next two years. That figure equals the value of all projects built in the last 11 years.

Modi has presided over ribbon-cutting ceremonies at many of them. Modernising infrastructure was a key part of his pitch to voters during this year's national election, when he won a third term as prime minister.

Over the last decade, his government says it has built 80 new airports, upgraded railways and expanded highways by many thousands of kilometres.

Niranjan Sahoo, a senior fellow at the Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi, said Friday's disaster at Terminal 1 raised fresh questions about the quality of infrastructure.

The collapsed metal canopy at Terminal 1 of Delhi airport.

"It puts the country, which aspires to be a global power, in a very poor light," he said, calling many of the projects an "electoral gimmick."

Economists and business leaders have justified a big budget for infrastructure, arguing it is necessary to turbocharge growth and build out the nation's manufacturing sector. As China's economy slows, many international companies are looking to India as an alternative for their factories.

Bloomberg Economics expects the infrastructure drive to help lift economic growth to 9 per cent by 2030, up from 8.2 per cent in the last financial year.

India's opposition leaders, however, have criticised some of the projects, calling them wasteful and rife with corruption.

They have accused Modi of diverting resources and attention from reducing poverty or unemployment. The country's infrastructure was "falling like a deck of cards", Mallikarjun Kharge, president of the opposition National Congress party, wrote on X.

Officials attempted damage control after the incident outside Terminal 1. Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu Kinjarapu said the structure that collapsed was not part of the recent renovations. "The building inaugurated by PM Modi is on the other side," he said.

Still, the disaster at the very least suggested poor maintenance, Sahoo said, and gave Modi's critics fresh fodder to attack his record.

"Infrastructure is just not about building those bridges, airports and ports and roads," he said. "It is also about governance. It is about maintaining them."

SINGAPORE

Russian goods find way to virtual stores

Bloomberg

Heavily discounted Russian-made goods, from hair products to chocolate, are finding their way onto Singapore's virtual supermarket shelves even as many countries – and companies – shun doing business with the nation following its invasion of Ukraine more than two years ago.

Visitors to Alibaba Group Holding's Singapore Lazada and Redmart sites can find several products originating from Russia, including 120 gram jars of salmon roe for S$11 (HK$63) as well as 460ml bottles of hair conditioner for S$2.49.

On other Singapore grocery sites, similarly sized jars of roe range between S$15.90 to S$44. On Shopee, a subsidiary of Sea Ltd, the online shelves are stocked with bargain made-in-Russia waffle cakes and hazelnut milk chocolates.

Alibaba owns the Post.

While several nations have import prohibitions on goods that have originated from Russia, Singapore's sanctions are limited to fundraising activities that benefit the Russian government and exports from the city state that could directly contribute to the war effort. There is no prohibition against selling Russian groceries on the island and globally there are no sanctions on Russian exports of food.

Based on the labels of the products bought by Bloomberg News, most appear to have been shipped from China. China has not imposed sanctions on Russia in response to its war in Ukraine.

Representatives for Lazada and Shopee did not respond to requests for comment.

Globally, more than 1,000 multinational companies have publicly announced they are voluntarily pulling away from Russia beyond the bare minimum legally required by international sanctions, according to the Yale School of Management.

Singapore has strongly condemned Russia's attack on Ukraine and last year, then prime minister Lee Hsien Loong said Russia's invasion of Ukraine gravely violated the United Nations charter and international law. But as the war drags into its third year, any outpouring of anger may be ebbing.

"Singaporeans may be against the Russian invasion of Ukraine but they're not against Russian goods," Tommy Koh, ambassador-at-large at Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said. "In Singapore, trade is our lifeblood. We trade with every country whether we like them or not."

Sovan Patra, a senior lecturer at Singapore Management University, said Singaporeans' pragmatism was possibly resulting in a distinction between a moral perspective on Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the practical matter of purchasing Russian-origin goods.

Singaporeans were not "generally the kind of people who boycott", he said.

MEDIA

Netflix boosts viewing figures with more local content

Resty Woro Yuniar
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An increase in local content has helped Netflix strengthen its market share in Southeast Asia, but analysts say the world's largest streaming television service still faces fierce competition from local rivals focused on Korean and Chinese dramas.

"Local content plays an important role in subscriber acquisition in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia and Thailand, two of Netflix's focus markets for local content production, alongside the Philippines," said Dhivya T, lead analyst at Media Partners Asia (MPA), which provides insights and advice to media companies in the Asia-Pacific.

According to Ampd Research, MPA's research arm, 11 per cent and 21 per cent of Netflix viewers became subscribers in Indonesia and Thailand, respectively, between January 2023 and March this year through first watching its local content offerings.

Netflix has also benefited from its US streaming rivals backpedalling from Southeast Asia. Disney+, which raised subscription prices in the region last year, is no longer focused on original content creation. Neither is Amazon's Prime Video due to a push by shareholders for profitability over subscriber growth.

At an event in Jakarta this month, Netflix highlighted its new and coming series and feature films from regional creators, which include acclaimed Indonesian director Joko Anwar's *Nightmares and Daydreams*, the country's first sci-fi series.

"We want to make sure that we bring locally authentic stories to our members in each of these countries," Minyoung Kim, vice-president of content at Netflix in Asia-Pacific except India, said at the June 13 event.

Joko's series, which premiered on June 14, went on to become the platform's fourth most watched non-English language programme globally, gaining 2.1 million views as of Thursday.

The show has also earned praise from Indonesian viewers, who often favour Korean dramas, Chinese series or Japanese anime over locally produced content.

> **49%**
>
> **Netflix accounts for this much of the streaming sector's total subscription revenue in Southeast Asia, according to an MPA report**

"It's not often for me to binge-watch Indonesian series, let alone a sci-fi one. Joko Anwar's *Nightmares and Daydreams* is an exquisite, mind-blowing masterpiece," user Ola wrote on X.

Hikmat Darmawan, a producer at Jakarta-based Imaginarium Pictures, said "it's only natural" that *Nightmares and Daydreams* was popular with Indonesian audiences.

"Netflix's content has the latest production standards. This has an impact because there is a transfer of technology and a transfer of knowledge to Indonesian filmmakers," he said.

Getting as much Korean content as possible has been the playbook for local and regional streamers such as Hong Kong's Viu and Jakarta-based Vidio, which also focuses on sports and dramas, according to Hikmat.

"Viu and Vidio are focused on the K-pop fan market. When dealing with Indonesian production houses, they would say 'your content is not Korean enough'. Netflix doesn't operate like that."

In Southeast Asia, Netflix leads the region in subscribers and monetisation, accounting for 49 per cent of the streaming sector's total subscription revenue, according to the MPA report.

The platform also surpassed 10 million subscribers at the end of the first quarter of this year, pulling ahead of local and regional competitors such as Viu, Disney+ Hotstar, Vidio, WeTV and Amazon Prime Video, the report added.

According to the MPA report, paid subscriptions to premium video-on-demand services in Southeast Asia reached 48.5 million in the first quarter of this year, up from 47.9 million last year, collecting an estimated revenue of US$381 million.

A line-up ranging from Thai dramas to romance and comedy titles and Indonesian horror films is expected to boost viewership, as such content had "the strongest regional impact", Dhivya said.

Among the Indonesia-produced Netflix original content scheduled to premier later this year is a horror film depicting a dysfunctional family trapped in a zombie outbreak, tentatively called *Abadi Non Jaya*.

From Thailand, an eight-part show about a sex columnist called *Doctor Climax* premiered on June 13, while *Tomorrow and I*, an anthology exploring the intersection of technology and Thai culture, is to air soon.

Zombies will also figure into the plot of Filipino-made film *Outside*, which will premiere on October 11.

We're seeing a man-made likely famine happen in front of our eyes that's primarily conflict-induced

BARRETT ALEXANDER, HEAD OF MERCY CORPS IN SUDAN, ON WARNINGS THAT A HUMANITARIAN DISASTER IN THE COUNTRY COULD BE WORSE THAN FEARED

Starliner's crew 'not stranded' aboard ISS

But Nasa officials offer no time frame to bring astronauts home as thruster tests continue

Agence France-Presse in Washington

The first astronauts to fly Boeing's troubled Starliner are definitely "not stranded" at the International Space Station (ISS), Nasa insists, despite having no clear time frame for bringing them home.

In an unusually defensive press call, officials attempted to put a positive spin on where things stood after weeks of negative headlines because of the spaceship's delayed return.

Astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams blasted off on June 5 following years of delays and safety scares affecting Starliner, as well as two aborted launch attempts that came as the crew were strapped in and ready to go.

They docked the following day for what was meant to be roughly a week-long stay, but their return has been pushed back multiple times because of thruster malfunctions and helium leaks that came to light during the journey.

"Butch and Suni are not stranded in space," said Steve Stich, Nasa's commercial crew programme manager.

He added the pair were "enjoying their time on the space station" and "our plan is to continue to return them on Starliner and ... at the right time".

Before that can happen, however, ground teams need to run more testing to better understand the causes.

It was known there was one helium leak affecting Starliner before the launch, but more leaks emerged during the flight. While non-combustible, helium provides pressure to the propulsion system.

Separately, some of Starliner's thrusters that provide fine manoeuvring initially failed to kick in, delaying docking. Engineers are not sure why Starliner's computer "deselected" these thrusters, though they were able to restart all but one of them.

The thruster testing could begin on Tuesday and would last at least two weeks, Stich said.

The Starliner programme has suffered from comparisons to SpaceX's Crew Dragon. Both companies were awarded multi-billion-dollar contracts in 2014 to provide the US space agency with rides to the ISS, with SpaceX succeeding in 2020 and carrying dozens of people since.

Boeing's reputation has also nosedived in the wake of the safety scandal surrounding its 737 Max passenger jets.



Suni Williams and Butch Wilmore (centre) at the space station.



Smooth sailing

A sailing ship makes its way through the Dvortsovy drawbridge on the Neva River during a fireworks display as part of the White Nights Festival in St Petersburg that celebrates the Russian city's Arctic location. Photo: AP

UNITED STATES

COURTS 'OVERSTEPPED' IN CAPITOL RIOT CASES

Dozens of convictions resulting from January 6 attack could be overturned after Supreme Court ruling with possible implications for Trump's defence

Agence France-Presse

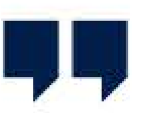
Prosecutors overstepped in charging January 6 Capitol building rioters with obstruction for trying to prevent certification of the 2020 US presidential election, the Supreme Court said in a case that could see dozens of convictions overturned.

The matter was brought to the court in the case of a former police officer Joseph Fischer, a supporter of former president Donald Trump who entered the Capitol in Washington with hundreds of others on January 6, 2021.

Writing the opinion for the majority, Chief Justice John Roberts said that the prosecutors' interpretation of the law would "criminalise a broad swathe of prosaic conduct, exposing activists and lobbyist[s] to decades in prison".

The government "must establish that the defendant impaired the availability or integrity for use in an official proceeding of records, documents, objects, or other things used in an official proceeding, or attempted to do so", he wrote.

The case was decided 6-3, with Ketanji Brown Jackson joining with the court's conservatives. Amy Coney Barrett, appointed by Trump, penned the dissent, which was joined by liberal judges Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan.



The vast majority of the more than 1,400 defendants ... will not be affected by this decision

ATTORNEY GENERAL MERRICK GARLAND

It now heads back to a lower court, which will decide whether Fischer's indictment can still stand in light of the narrower interpretation of "obstruction".

In all, 52 rioters have been convicted and sentenced on obstruction charges, with 27 currently incarcerated, the US Department of Justice said in a statement.

"The vast majority of the more than 1,400 defendants charged for their illegal actions on January 6 will not be affected by this decision," Attorney General Merrick Garland said.

At the core of the case was how to interpret the word "otherwise" in the relevant statute, the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, which was enacted after the destruction of documents in the 2001 Enron scandal.

This imposes up to 20 years in prison for whoever corruptly tampers with documents in an attempt to prevent them from being used in official proceedings, or "otherwise obstructs, influences, or impedes any official proceeding, or attempts to do so".

The word "otherwise" grants prosecutors excessive latitude, allowing them to pursue charges that far exceed the scope of Congress' initial purpose, the majority said.

But in her dissent, Barrett said the fact that the joint session by Congress on January 6 was an official proceeding was not in dispute.

"Given these premises, the case that Fischer can be tried for 'obstructing, influencing, or impeding an official proceeding' seems open and shut," she wrote, accusing the majority of performing "textual backflips to find some way – any way" to narrow the reach of the relevant subsection.

This case also has potentially significant implications for Donald Trump, who faces four felony charges brought by Special Counsel Jack Smith over his alleged efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

The Republican presidential candidate is charged with conspiracy to defraud the United States, conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding and obstruction of an official proceeding, namely the session of Congress held to certify Biden's victory.

He is also charged with conspiracy to deny Americans the right to vote and to have their votes counted.

But this case is on hold until the Supreme Court rules on Trump's claims he is immune from criminal prosecution, which the judges are now expected to deliver tomorrow.

RUSSIA

Putin reveals plan to resume banned missile production

President notes that US has already deployed shorter-range systems covered by INF Treaty

Reuters in Moscow

President Vladimir Putin has said Russia should resume production of intermediate and shorter range nuclear-capable missiles, and then consider where to deploy them after the US brought similar missiles to Europe and Asia.

Such a move would end all that remains from one of the most significant arms controls treaties of the Cold War, amid fears the world's two biggest nuclear powers could be entering a new arms race together with China.

The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, signed by presidents Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan in 1987, marked the first time the superpowers had agreed to reduce their nuclear arsenals and eliminate a whole category of nuclear weapons.

The US under then president Donald Trump formally withdrew from the INF Treaty in 2019 after saying Moscow was violating the accord, an accusation the Kremlin repeatedly denied and dismissed as a pretext.

Russia then imposed a moratorium on its own development of missiles previously banned by the INF treaty – ground-based ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of 500km to 5,500km.

Putin said Russia had pledged not to deploy such missiles but that the US had resumed their production, brought them to Denmark for exercises and also taken them to the Philippines.

"We need to respond to this and make decisions about what we will have to do in this direction next," Putin was shown on state television telling Russia's Security Council.

"Apparently, we need to start manufacturing these strike systems and then, based on the actual situation, make decisions about where – if necessary to ensure our safety – to place them."

Russia and the United States, by far the biggest nuclear powers, have both expressed regret about the disintegration of the tangle of arms control treaties that sought to slow the Cold War arms race.

Trump in 2018 said he wanted to terminate the INF Treaty because of what he said were years of Russian violations and his concerns about China's intermediate-range missile arsenal.

Putin has said in the past that the US withdrawal would trigger a new arms race.

Washington publicly blamed Russia's development of the 9M729 ground-launched cruise missile, known in Nato as the SSC-8, as the reason for it leaving the INF Treaty.

In his moratorium proposal, Putin suggested Russia could agree not to deploy the missiles in its Baltic coast exclave of Kaliningrad. Since leaving the pact, the United States has tested missiles with a similar profile.

Putin said this month that he could deploy conventional missiles within range of the US and its European allies if they let Ukraine strike deeper into Russia with Western weapons.



A 9M729 land-based cruise missile, which can carry a nuclear warhead to a range of 2,500km, on display on the outskirts of Moscow. Photo: AP

SUDAN

755,000 on the brink of starvation in 'man-made' famine, aid groups warn

Agence France-Presse in Khartoum

Aid groups are warning that Sudan's "man-made famine" could be even worse than feared, with the most catastrophic death toll the world has seen in decades, without more global pressure on warring generals.

A UN-backed study last week warned that 755,000 people were on the brink of starvation in Sudan, a death toll not seen since the 1980s when famine in Ethiopia shocked the world.

Barrett Alexander, the director of programmes in Sudan for Mercy Corps, said even that figure could be an underestimate as the conflict had displaced farmers in the country's agricultural areas, raising fears for the next harvest.

"Honestly, I wouldn't be surprised if it were a little bit higher than that number," he said of the projection by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification initiative, or IPC.

"We're seeing a man-made likely famine happen in front of our eyes that's primarily conflict-induced," Alexander, who is based in Port Sudan, said on a visit to Washington.

The IPC said that nearly 26 million people – half of Sudan's population – were facing acute food insecurity with the 755,000 in catastrophic conditions.

Fighting erupted in April 2023 between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces after a plan to integrate them failed, with the warring generals seizing territory.

Alexander said that both sides had imposed cumbersome levels of bureaucracy, including requiring permits of aid workers.

"Getting across the front lines is nearly impossible," he said.

Eatizaz Yousif, Sudan country director for the International Rescue Committee, said there had already been accounts of people resorting to eating grass in South Kordofan state.

"Definitely we will be seeing very soon people dying from a lack of food in different parts of the country," said Yousif, who was also in Washington.

She said that the belligerents had looted food warehouses and harassed or killed humanitarian workers.

"It's definitely a man-made hunger crisis because we don't have a problem with the level of grain at this time," she said.

The United States has been seeking to bring the warring sides back to the negotiating table but has seen little interest, with diplomats saying both sides believe they can win on the battlefield.

Regional players have increasingly been involved in Sudan, with the United Arab Emirates accused of funnelling military support to the Rapid Support Forces, whose fighters helped the wealthy Gulf country in Yemen.

The paramilitaries have also allegedly received support from Russia's Wagner mercenaries, while Egypt, Turkey and reportedly Iran have backed the army.

FRANCE

Far-right senses power as nation goes to the polls

Agence France-Presse in Paris

A divided France yesterday braced for high-stakes parliamentary polls that could see the anti-immigrant and Eurosceptic party of Marine Le Pen sweep to power in a historic first.

The candidates formally ended their frantic campaigns at midnight on Friday, with political activity banned until today's first round of voting.

Most polls show that Le Pen's far-right National Rally (RN) is on course to win the largest number of National Assembly seats, though it remains unclear if the party will secure an outright majority.

A high turnout is predicted and final opinion polls have given the RN between 35 per cent and 37 per cent of the vote, against 27.5-29 per cent for the left wing New Popular Front alliance and 20 to 21 per cent for President Emmanuel Macron's centrist camp.

That would put France on course for political chaos and confusion with a hung parliament, said Mujtaba Rahman, Europe head at the Eurasia Group. "There is no precedent in recent French politics for such an impasse," Rahman said.

Macron's decision to call snap polls after the RN's runaway victory in European Parliament elections this month stunned friends and foes and sparked uncertainty in Europe's second-biggest economy. The Paris stock exchange suffered its biggest monthly decline in two years in June, dropping by 6.4 per cent.

In an editorial, French daily Le Monde said it was time to mobilise against the far-right. "Yielding any power to it means nothing less than taking the risk of seeing everything that has been built and conquered over more than two and a half centuries gradually being undone," it said.

Brice Teinturier, head of the Ipsos polling firm, said there were two tendencies coming out of the campaign. "One is a dynamic of hope" with left wing and RN supporters believing that "there can be a change".

But Teinturier also highlighted "the negative politicisation, the fear, the dread caused by the RN and in a part of the electorate by the France Unbowed and the coalition of the left".

Macron apparently hoped to catch political opponents off guard by presenting voters with a crucial choice about France's future, but observers said he might have lost his gamble.

Many have pointed to a rise in hate speech, intolerance and racism in the charged campaign. A video of two RN supporters verbally assaulting a black woman has gone viral in recent days.

Speaking on the sidelines of a European summit in Brussels on Thursday, Macron deplored "racism or antisemitism".

Support for Macron's centrist camp collapsed during the campaign, while left-wing parties put their bickering aside to form the New Popular Front, in a nod to an alliance founded in 1936 to combat fascism.

35-37%

Opinion polls suggest the far-right National Rally (RN) will win this proportion of the vote in the French general election

Support for the far-right has surged, with analysts saying Le Pen's years-long efforts to clean up the image of a party co-founded by a former Waffen SS member have paid off.

"If we come to power, we'll be able to demonstrate to the French people that we'll keep our promises," Le Pen wrote on X, vowing to bolster purchasing power and "curb insecurity and immigration".

Under Macron, France has been one of Ukraine's main Western backers since Russia invaded in February 2022. But Le Pen and her 28-year-old lieutenant, party chief Jordan Bardella, said they would scale down French support for Ukraine, by ruling out sending ground troops and long-range missiles.

UNITED STATES

BIDEN COMES OUT SWINGING AFTER DEBATE DEBACLE

President says he is the right man to win election at fiery campaign rally amid talk of replacing the 81-year-old before Democratic Party convention



Former president Donald Trump at a rally in Virginia.

RIGHTS ACTIVISTS SLAM TRUMP FOR 'RACIST INSULTS'

Human rights advocates have condemned former president Donald Trump's references to Palestinians, and immigrants allegedly taking black American jobs, during a debate with President Joe Biden, calling the remarks racist or insulting.

Biden and Trump had a brief exchange on the war in Gaza but did not have a substantive discussion on how to end the conflict which has killed more than 37,000 in the enclave, according to the Gaza health ministry, and caused a massive humanitarian crisis with widespread hunger.

The war began when Palestinian Hamas militants attacked Israel on October 7, killing 1,200 people and abducting some 250 others, according to Israeli tallies.

"The only one who wants the war to continue is Hamas," Biden said. Trump responded by saying Biden had "become like a Palestinian", which rights advocates said came across as a slur.

"Actually, Israel is the one [that wants to keep going], and you should let them go and let them finish the job. He [Biden] doesn't want to do it. He's become like a Palestinian but they don't like him because he's a very bad Palestinian. He's a weak one," Trump said.

On Friday, Trump again used the term "Palestinian", this time saying in a rally that Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, who is Jewish, was Palestinian. "He's become a Palestinian because they have a couple more votes or something," he said.

The Council on American Islamic Relations advocacy group said Biden was wrong to claim that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wants the war to end, while adding it viewed Trump's Palestinian comment in the debate as a racist insult.

"Former president Trump's use of 'Palestinian' as an insult was racist. President Biden's touting of his military support for the Israeli government's genocide in Gaza was callous," said Corey Saylor, research and advocacy director at CAIR.
Reuters

Agence France-Presse
in Washington

A fired-up Joe Biden has come out swinging as he seeks to make up for a disastrous debate performance against Donald Trump, insisting he is the right man to win November's US presidential election.

Biden's appearance at a campaign rally in the battleground state of North Carolina came amid rumblings in his alarmed Democratic Party about replacing the 81-year-old as their nominee.

"I don't walk as easy as I used to. I don't speak as smoothly as I used to. I don't debate as well as I used to," Biden admitted to supporters in unusually confessional remarks on Friday. "But I know how to tell the truth. I know how to do this job," he said to huge cheers, vowing "when you get knocked down, you get back up".

Biden's team was in damage-control mode after Thursday's debate when he repeatedly hesitated, tripped over words and lost his train of thought – exacerbating fears about his ability to serve another term.

He had hoped to allay qualms about his advanced age and to paint Trump as an existential threat to the future of the United States.

But the president struggled to counter his bombastic rival, who delivered an unchallenged reel of false or misleading statements about everything from the economy to immigration.

On Friday, Biden delivered the lines that his supporters wished he could have produced in the televised debate as the election looms a little over four months away.

"Did you see Trump last night? My guess is he set a new record for the most lies told in the single debate," Biden said.

"I would not be running again if I didn't believe with all my heart and soul I can do this job because the stakes are too high.

"Donald Trump is a genuine threat to this nation. He's a threat to our freedom. He's a threat to our democracy. He's literally a threat for everything America stands for."

America's most influential newspaper, The New York Times, called in an editorial on Friday for Biden to step aside and allow another Democrat to challenge Trump.

Describing Biden as "the shadow of a great public servant", the newspaper's editorial board – which is separate from its newsroom – said Thursday's debate proved the president had "failed his own test".

His determination to run again was a "reckless gamble", it said, adding: "The greatest public service Mr Biden can now perform is to announce that he will not continue to run for re-election."

After the shock over Biden's poor showing, there was talk of how the process might work to find a new candidate before the party's convention in August.

So far, no senior Democratic figure has publicly called on Biden to withdraw, with most toeing a party line about sticking with the existing ticket.

"Bad debate nights happen," Biden's former boss, Barack Obama, wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

But the election was "still a choice between someone who has fought for ordinary folks his entire life and someone who only cares about himself. Between someone who tells the truth; who knows right from wrong … and someone who lies through his teeth for his own benefit", he wrote.

"Last night didn't change that, and it's why so much is at stake in November."

Analysts say forcing a change in the ticket would be politically fraught, and Biden would have to decide himself to withdraw to make way for another nominee before the party convention.





> My guess is [Trump] set a new record for the most lies told in the single debate
>
> U.S. PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN

A strong – but not automatic – candidate to take Biden's place would be Vice-President Kamala Harris, who loyally defended his performance on Thursday while acknowledging he had made a "slow start".

As both candidates returned to the campaign trail, Trump told supporters at an afternoon rally in Chesapeake, Virginia, on Friday that he had a "big victory against a man looking to destroy our country". "Joe Biden's problem is not his age," Trump said. "It's his competence."

Trump advisers said they thought the debate would bolster their chances in Democratic-leaning states like Virginia, which has not backed a Republican presidential candidate since 2004.

His allies sought to project calm assurance as the Democrats scrambled.

US House Speaker Mike Johnson, a senior Republican figure, said it was clear that Biden was not "up to the job".

"Donald Trump is the only man on that stage that's qualified and capable of serving as the next president. The election cannot get here soon enough."
Additional reporting by Reuters

IRAN



Women queue at a polling station in Tehran to choose a successor to Ebrahim Raisi, who was killed in a helicopter crash. Photo: Reuters

Moderate and hardliner head to run-off

No clear winner in first round of voting to replace president killed in crash

Reuters in Tehran

A moderate lawmaker will face the Iranian supreme leader's protégé in a run-off presidential election on July 5 after the country's interior ministry said yesterday that no candidate secured enough votes in the first round of voting.

Friday's vote to replace Ebrahim Raisi after his death in a helicopter crash came down to a tight race between a low-profile lawmaker Massoud Pezeshkian, the sole moderate in a field of four candidates, and former Revolutionary Guards member Saeed Jalili.

The interior ministry said neither secured the 50 per cent plus one vote required to win outright among the more than 25 million ballots cast.

The first round had Pezeshkian leading with more than 10 million votes, ahead of Jalili with about 9.4 million.

Power in Iran ultimately lies with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, so the result will not herald any major policy shift on Iran's nuclear programme or its support for militia groups across the Middle East.

But the president runs the government day-to-day and can influence the tone of Iran's policy.

The clerical establishment hoped for a high turnout, as it faces a legitimacy crisis fuelled by public discontent over economic hardship and curbs on political and social freedom.

However, turnout in Friday's vote hit a historic low of about 40 per cent, based on an interior ministry count released yesterday.

The election comes at a time of escalating regional tension due to the war between Israel and Iranian allies Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon, as well as increased Western pressure on Iran over its fast-advancing nuclear programme.

With Iran's supreme leader now 85, it is likely that the next president will be closely involved in the process of choosing a successor to Khamenei, who seeks a fiercely loyal president who can ensure a smooth eventual succession to his own position, insiders and analysts say.

The anti-Western views of Jalili, Iran's uncompromising former nuclear negotiator, offer a contrast to those of Pezeshkian. Analysts said a Jalili win would signal the possibility of an even more antagonistic turn in the country's foreign and domestic policy.

But a victory for mild-mannered lawmaker Pezeshkian might help ease tensions with the West, and improve the chances of seeing economic reform, social liberalisation and political pluralism.

Pezeshkian, faithful to Iran's theocratic rule, is backed by the reformist faction that has largely been sidelined in Iran in recent years.

"We will respect the hijab law, but there should never be any intrusive or inhumane behaviour towards women," Pezeshkian said after casting his vote.

He was referring to the death of Mahsa Amini, a young Kurdish woman, in 2022 while in morality police custody for allegedly violating the mandatory Islamic dress code.

The unrest sparked by Amini's death spiralled into the biggest show of opposition to Iran's clerical rulers in years.

The election was a contest among a tightly controlled group of three hardline candidates and one low-profile moderate loyal to the supreme leader. A hardline watchdog body approved only six from an initial pool of 80 candidates, and two hardline ones subsequently dropped out.

Critics of the clerical establishment say that low turnouts in recent years show the system's legitimacy has eroded.

Turnout was 48 per cent in the 2021 presidential election and a record low of 41 per cent of people voted in a parliamentary election in March.

All candidates have vowed to revive the economy, beset by mismanagement, state corruption and sanctions reimposed since 2018 by the United States after it ditched a nuclear deal.

"I think Jalili is the only candidate who raised the issue of justice, fighting corruption and giving value to the poor. … Most importantly, he does not link Iran's foreign policy to the nuclear deal," said Farzan, a 45-year-old artist in the city of Karaj.

In the past few weeks, Iranians have made wide use of the hashtag #ElectionCircus on X, with some activists at home and abroad calling for a boycott, saying a high turnout would only serve to legitimise the Islamic republic.

PANAMA

Court acquits 28 defendants in 'Panama Papers' trial

Agence France-Presse

A Panamanian court has acquitted 28 people charged with money laundering at the centre of the "Panama Papers" scandal, the court said.

Judge Baloisa Marquinez "acquitted 28 people accused … of money laundering" relating to the now-defunct Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca, the court said on Friday.

Among those acquitted were the firm's founders, Jurgen Mossack and Ramon Fonseca. The latter died in May in a Panamanian hospital.

During the trial, which was held in Panama City in April, the prosecution asked for 12 years in prison for the duo, the maximum sentence for money laundering.

However, Marquinez found that evidence collected from the law firm's servers had not been gathered in line with due process, raising doubts about its "authenticity and integrity".

The judge also ruled that "the rest of the evidence was not sufficient and conclusive to determine the criminal responsibility of the defendants", the statement said.

Leaked documents from Mossack Fonseca in 2016 revealed how many of the world's wealthy stashed assets in offshore companies, triggering scores of investigations around the globe.

Others implicated included former British prime minister David Cameron, football star Lionel Messi, Argentina's then president Mauricio Macri and Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodovar, to name but a few.

ISRAEL-GAZA WAR

US 'has sent more than 10,000 highly destructive bombs to Israel'

Reuters in Washington

The Biden administration has sent to Israel large numbers of munitions, including more than 10,000 highly destructive 907kg bombs and thousands of Hellfire missiles, since the start of the war in Gaza, say two US officials briefed on an updated list of weapons shipments.

Between the war's start last October and recent days, the United States has transferred at least 14,000 of the MK-84 907kg bombs, 6,500 226kg bombs, 3,000 Hellfire precision-guided air-to-ground missiles, 1,000 bunker-buster bombs, 2,600 airdropped small-diameter bombs, and other munitions, according to the officials, who were not authorised to speak publicly.

While the officials did not give a timeline for the shipments, the totals suggest there has been no significant drop-off in US military support for its ally, despite international calls to limit weapons supplies and a recent administration decision to pause a shipment of powerful bombs.

Experts said the contents of the shipments appear consistent with what Israel would need to replenish supplies used in this eight-month intense military campaign in Gaza, which it launched after the October 7 attack by Palestinian Hamas militants who killed 1,200 people and took 250 others hostage, according to Israeli tallies.

"While these numbers could be expended relatively quickly in a major conflict, this list clearly reflects a substantial level of support from the United States for our Israeli allies," said Tom Karako, a weapons expert at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, adding that the listed munitions were the type Israel would use in its fight against Hamas or in a potential conflict with Hezbollah.

Casualty figures

GAZA		ISRAEL
37,834	Killed	1,360

Sources: Gaza Health Ministry, Israel Government SCMP

The delivery numbers, which have not been previously reported, provide the most up-to-date and extensive tally of munitions shipped to Israel since the Gaza war began.

Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah have been trading fire since the start of the Gaza war, and concern is rising that an all-out war could break out between the two sides.

The White House declined to comment. Israel's embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The shipments were part of a bigger list of weapons sent to Israel since the Gaza conflict began, one of the US officials said. A senior Biden administration official on Wednesday told reporters that Washington had since October 7 sent US$6.5 billion worth of security assistance to Israel.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in recent weeks claimed that Washington was withholding weapons, a suggestion US officials have repeatedly denied even though they acknowledged some "bottlenecks".

The Biden administration has paused one shipment of the 907kg bomb, citing concern over the impact it could have in densely populated areas in Gaza, but US officials insist that all other arms deliveries continue as normal. One 907kg bomb can rip through thick concrete and metal, creating a wide blast radius.



Palestinians survey the damage caused by an Israeli air strike in Deir al Balah in the Gaza Strip on Friday. US has delayed a May arms shipment to Israel. Photo: DPA

Reuters reported on Thursday that the US was discussing with Israel the release of a shipment of large bombs that was suspended in May over worries about the military operation in Rafah.

International scrutiny of Israel's military operation in Gaza has intensified as the Palestinian death toll from the war has exceeded 37,000, according to the Gaza health ministry.

Washington gives US$3.8 billion in annual military assistance to its long-time ally. While President Joe Biden has warned that he would place conditions on military aid if Israel fails to protect civilians and allow more humanitarian aid into Gaza, he has not done so beyond delaying the May shipment.

Biden's support for Israel in its war against Hamas has emerged as a political liability, particularly among young Democrats, as he runs for re-election this year. It fuelled a wave of "uncommitted" protest votes in primaries and has driven pro-Palestinian protests at US universities.

While the US provides detailed descriptions and quantities of military aid sent to Ukraine as it fights a full-scale invasion of Russia, the administration has revealed few details about the full extent of US weapons and munitions sent to Israel.

I gave people at the HKFA ideas to be better and more professional. I think they listened, but, sometimes, didn't have the [desire] to do what I emphasised for them

FORMER HONG KONG FOOTBALL TEAM HEAD COACH JORN ANDERSEN, ON HIS FRUSTRATION AT NOT BEING ABLE TO GET OFFICIALS TO IMPROVE THE STATE OF THE GAME LOCALLY

SPORT

BASKETBALL

Shanghai Sharks labelled 'worst' outfit in dispute

Ex-NBA player Vonleh says he has not been paid and that officials tried to break into his room

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NBA journeyman Noah Vonleh has opened up on his nightmare playing basketball on the mainland, saying he had not been paid by Shanghai Sharks and revealed team officials tried to break into his hotel room during the league's All-Star break.

The 28-year-old took to social media to blast the Chinese Basketball Association side (CBA) and its officials for trying to rush him back from injury too soon, and wrongfully terminating his contract.



They [were] using weapons to try and break in and threatening me, saying all kind of things

NOAH VONLEH

In a lengthy statement on Instagram, Vonleh said the Sharks were the "worst organisation" he had ever played for in his career. Neither the Sharks nor CBA have responded to his comments.

"[The Sharks are] very unprofessional," the former New York Knicks player wrote. "They still owe me my play-off bonus from the 2021-22 season. They also still owe me the remaining balance of my salary for the 2023-24 season."

"The Sharks tried to rush me back many times and told team doctors, and doctors outside of the team, to lie to me and tell me I'm OK to play. I sent my MRI results to doctors in the [United] States and they ... confirmed I wasn't ready to return to play."

Vonleh, who played with eight NBA teams across as many seasons in his career, said the Sharks terminated his contract in February, and sent warnings to the player's Chinese agents accusing the 2.08 metre former first-round pick of missing team practices, only for security footage to prove that was untrue.

According to Vonleh, things came to a head at the CBA All-Star Weekend in Xiamen in March, with Sharks general manager Liu Peng reportedly ordering people to try to break into the former Charlotte Hornet's hotel room while he was sleeping.

"There were six people coming to my room trying to break in and grab me out the room," Vonleh wrote in a post, alongside a picture purportedly showing a device used by those trying to get in.

"They [were] using weapons to try and break in and threatening me, saying all kind of things."

Last in the NBA with the Boston Celtics in the 2022-23 season, Vonleh has deleted all his Instagram posts, except those relating to the Sharks incident.

One Weibo user from Beijing suggested Vonleh had effectively ended his playing career in China by posting the incident online.

"This is not only slandering against the club but also China," he said. "If they had owed you money from the 2021-22 season, how could you still join them for the 2023-24 season?"

"He should go to Fiba if there's any truth to these," a comment from Shandong said. "CBA hasn't become a lawless place yet, right?"

In April last year, the Sharks were accused of match-fixing in the first round of their CBA play-off series against Jiangsu Dragons.

The clubs were fined 5 million yuan (HK$5.37 million), some officials banned for years, the clubs kicked out of the competition and their results this season erased.



Noah Vonleh, shooting for the Boston Celtics, has been scathing of his treatment by the Shanghai Sharks organisation. Photo: Getty Images

Dynamic Dupont



Toulouse and France rugby union scrum half Antoine Dupont celebrates with the trophy and fans after thrashing Bordeaux-Begles 59-3 in the French Top 14 final in Marseille. Dupont, who will spearhead the France side in the sevens competition at the Paris Olympics, was in superb form for Toulouse, scoring two tries. He said the victory was "incredible" with the club securing a domestic and Champions Cup double.

Dupont, 27, made his contributions early in the second half as the holders claimed both trophies in one season for a third time. Bordeaux-Begles had just one Maxime Lucu penalty on the scoreboard as they conceded nine tries in their first appearance in a final in either competition. "It's incredible for the history of the club and these guys," Dupont said.

"I think I've achieved much more than I could have dreamed of as a child. I have to realise that but not too much as to keep dreaming," the 2021 World Rugby player of the year added. A victory in the men's sevens at the Paris Games would be historic for Les Bleus, beating the women's silver medal in Tokyo three years ago. "I have one week of holidays before I join up with the Olympics squad," Dupont said.

Dupont's ability seemed to have peaked in early 2022. He had claimed Toulouse's second double and lifted France's first Six Nations in more than a decade. They came a few months after he was named global player of the year. This season, Dupont's 15-a-side campaign started with a heartbreaking World Cup quarter-final defeat by eventual winners South Africa.

He has managed to put that to one side and in February he turned his hand to the shorter form of the game and was like a duck to water on his sevens debut in Canada. A week later he helped Les Bleus to their first leg success since 2005 as they won in Los Angeles. The former Castres halfback ended the campaign with another win, in Madrid. The rookie of the year award followed, having featured in just three of the eight legs.

His two tries in the Top 14 final took him to 11 club touchdowns for the season, equalling his 2021 personal best. Dupont has become a symbol of the increasingly healthy state of French rugby, with the national team and its clubs blossoming. "I think in the few years to come he can revolutionise the sport," Toulouse head coach Ugo Mola said of Dupont. Photo: AFP

FOOTBALL

CALL TO STOP USING TAXPAYER MILLIONS TO PROP UP THE GAME

Former Hong Kong head coach Andersen says local bosses lack motivation to improve structure

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Jorn Andersen, the former Hong Kong head coach, said local football officials would have no motivation to improve the game in the city as long as they were propped up by millions of dollars of taxpayer cash every year.

The Norwegian, who quit last month to take over at China League One side Yunnan Yukun, said he did not want to open fire on his old employers, but they needed to be "more professional, from top to bottom".

Andersen, who spent 2½ years in charge of the senior team, said he felt the Football Association of Hong Kong, China (HKFA) did "not do enough" to develop the sport.

After taking over in December 2021, Andersen transformed a directionless Hong Kong team into a dynamic side that qualified for this year's AFC Asian Cup finals in Qatar.

While he made Hong Kong football feel good about itself on the surface, however, the former North Korea coach was hamstrung by a failing, poorly-run domestic scene, which attracts scant supporter interest.

An average of 576 fans watched matches in the local Premier League last season. The HKFA received HK$24.2 million of government funds for the 2023-24 season, and Andersen believes this contributes to a lack of action from the likes of HKFA chairman Eric Fok Kai-shan, among others.

"The government supports Hong Kong football with big money," Andersen said. "It is a big problem that the HKFA don't earn their own money. Every other association sells out stadiums, and has sponsors and big TV deals. This is how they live, not from government funding.

"In Hong Kong, we live off the government. We do nothing to get sponsorship deals, nothing to get spectators in the stadiums, and nothing to get good television deals."

Fok was elected unopposed 12 months ago, to extend the ongoing 54-year family dynasty, after father Timothy and grandfather Henry both served extended terms as the association's president.

Andersen said he "had a positive experience" with Eric Fok, although reiterated his dismay over the chairman staying away from the Asian Cup finals until Hong Kong's closing match.

"He asked me a lot about what we can improve," Andersen said. "I gave him lots of tips, so we will see what he can do for the HKFA.

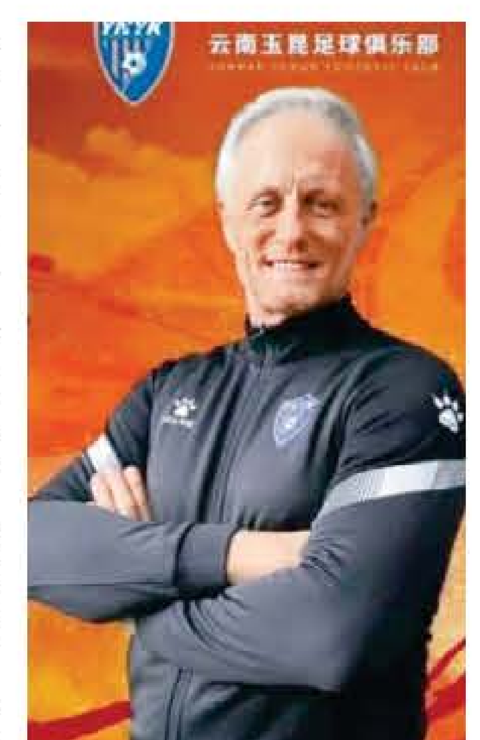
"I gave people at the HKFA ideas to be better and more professional. I think they listened, but, sometimes, didn't have the [desire] to do what I emphasised for them.

"I liked working with the people [in senior positions]. If they are the right people [for those jobs], I don't want to comment. It is for the HKFA to answer."

As well as searching for Andersen's replacement, the governing body is also without a CEO, after Joaquin Tam was fired last month.

As an example of inadequate executive management, Andersen cited the Asian Cup qualifiers in India, during the pandemic, in June 2022 when Hong Kong travelled without a doctor.

"I was the doctor, I had to decide who could play, and who couldn't," he said. "If I picked a player, and something [bad] happened, I was the reason."



We do nothing to get sponsorship deals, nothing to get spectators, nothing to get good TV deals

JORN ANDERSEN, ON THE HKFA

While in charge, Andersen offered the governing body and the city's clubs multiple ideas for repairing the failing local football structure, but it fell on deaf ears.

He hopes, though, the HKFA heeds his latest advice, which is to develop at least two new training centres, in addition to the 12-hectare site in Tseung Kwan O.

"We don't have enough fields to improve young players, who are the future of Hong Kong football," Andersen said. "The clubs need better training facilities, too. Tai Po and Rangers train on bad artificial grass, so the practice quality is very bad."

Andersen was bewildered clubs ignored his advice to train after sunset. "I was sweating like I was in a sauna when I watched ... If they train later, players can work harder and longer."

At Hong Kong's first game after Andersen's resignation, against Iran this month, fans unfurled a banner in tribute to the former boss, chanting his name.

"The fans are fantastic," Andersen said. "There are more than seven million people [in the city], if we get more of them interested in Hong Kong football, it will grow. There is the potential to sell out Hong Kong games at the new stadium [Kai Tak], and to attract more sponsors, and better deals."

ATHLETICS

Thompson sizzles in 9.77 in marker for Olympics

Reuters

Kishane Thompson registered a sizzling world-leading mark of 9.77 seconds to win the men's 100 metres at the Jamaican Olympic trials, becoming the joint ninth-fastest man in history.

Oblique Seville, the two-time World Championships finalist, was second in 9.82, while world indoor 60m bronze medallist Ackeem Blake was third in 9.92 in qualifying for the Paris Games.

Thompson, who is in only his second season as a professional, had not raced at all this season before the Jamaican championship and said he could go faster.

"My coach instructed me just to run the first 60 metres, nothing more, after that, shut it down," he said. "If I came second or third, I would've made the team. The goal wasn't to prove anything tonight, just run the 70 or 60 metres and see where I was."

Thompson, now the fourth fastest Jamaican – behind Usain Bolt, Yohan Blake and Asafa Powell – said he had much to improve on making his Olympic debut in Paris. "It's kind of new to me, but I'm getting it slowly," he said.

Shericka Jackson recovered from a poor start to win the women's 100m in 10.84, clawing her way from the back of the field after 30 metres to power past teenager Tia Clayton, in 10.90, and twice Olympic champion Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce who clocked 10.94.

Jackson, the back-to-back world champion in the 200m, said winning was more important than running a faster time.

"Coach and I sat down and talked about how we wanted to approach the season, and I think we did pretty good, having only ran one 100m prior to the national trials," Jackson said.

For Fraser-Pryce, it will be her fifth Olympics at the age of 37. The veteran will be chasing a third career gold medal in the blue riband event in Paris.

China vow to be positive in tough World Cup task

Michael Church

China will go into the next phase of Asia's qualifiers for the 2026 World Cup with head coach Branko Ivankovic pledging they will not be pushovers, despite facing regional heavyweights Japan, Australia and Saudi Arabia.

The Chinese kept their dreams of a place in Canada, Mexico and the United States alive by the narrowest of margins when the previous round concluded earlier this month, advancing ahead of Thailand with a better head-to-head record over the Southeast Asians.

Ivankovic's appointment led to a turnaround in the team's fortunes, but an even tougher task now lies ahead, with the underdogs also up against Bahrain and Indonesia in Group C.

"We are very happy to be among the best Asian teams and we will prepare ourselves as well as possible," Ivankovic said.

"The most important thing is for players to come into any game with full self-confidence and to be positive about how we can beat our opponent. It doesn't matter if it is Japan, Australia or Saudi Arabia.

"It will be very tough but I'm the coach and we have come here to play qualifying games. We want to do something. We have the quality to be very competitive with any team in our group."



Coach Branko Ivankovic wants to see a more spirited China side.

The experienced Croatian, who took Iran to the World Cup in Germany in 2006, has overseen a major mood change within the Chinese game since replacing Serbia's Aleksandar Jankovic.

Jankovic was sacked in February after China crashed out of the Asian Cup in January at the end of the group stage without scoring a goal, and Ivankovic has implemented a number of changes to the squad.

He recalled the Brazil-born naturalised players Elkeson, Alan Carvalho and Fernandinho, while also giving debuts to Shandong Taishan midfielder Xie Wenneng and Shenzhen Peng City striker Behram Abduweli, who scored the vital equaliser in this month's 1-1 draw with Thailand.

"I don't want to think about what has gone on in the past," Ivankovic said. "I changed some players with different reasons and I'm very satisfied with these new players. They showed something new; action, motivation, fighting until the end of the game.

"They do something for the national team and the people. This is important for me. I expect to use maybe some new players and they will bring fresh blood to the national team and this is important.

"Of course, this generation should show that they deserve to play at a high level, especially in Asia, and then we will see what's going on."

Ivankovic said more players could be naturalised to further strengthen his squad and stressed his team would not give up easily on efforts to secure the nation's first appearance at the World Cup since their debut in South Korea back in 2002.

"We're not going to go into any game with our hands up," he said. "We want to fight against any team from the first minute to the 90th minute and we will try to make some surprise. I'm sure we have a team which can do something like that.

"This is the most important, for the players to believe in what we have started.

"We have qualified for this last stage of the preliminary rounds and this is something that gives big satisfaction for us.

"And I expect it will help the players have more self-confidence and to come to the pitch with the idea of how to beat our opponent."

SPORT

Renaissance backdrop



Riders head past the Palazzo Vecchio town hall and Piazza Signoria at the start of the first stage of the Tour de France race in Florence, Italy yesterday. Searing heat greeted the field for the 206km to Rimini with Tadej Pogacar gunning for a historic Giro-Tour double, while champion Jonas Vingegaard seeks a third straight title.

The pair led the peloton past key sites in the Renaissance city of Florence. The hilly first of three stages in Italy was set to cause a few surprises in the cycling classic with temperatures of 35 degrees Celsius being forecast in the shade.
Photo: AFP

TENNIS

HOW NAVRATILOVA FOUGHT TO HELP SAVE THE WOMEN'S GAME

Wimbledon legend tips Swiatek to win a lot more majors and says Gauff is now living up to the hype

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Martina Navratilova, the 18-time singles grand slam champion, said she was fighting to stop the women's tennis tour from being killed off during her domination of the sport in the 1980s.

On the eve of this year's Wimbledon, Navratilova tipped the current star of the female game, Iga Swiatek, to "win a lot more majors", and said an increasingly mature Coco Gauff was beginning to live up to the hype that accompanied her thrilling emergence when aged 15.

The near £35.9 million (HK$354.5 million) prize pot for this year's Wimbledon will be divided equally between men and women. All four majors have provided pay parity since 2007, when Wimbledon and the French Open caught up with their Australian Open and US Open counterparts.

Equal pay is not uniformly applied on the regular circuit, although the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) has committed to ensuring a complete levelling up by 2033. Ons Jabeur, the world No 10, said the WTA pledge was "not enough".

"I have always wondered why this plan is now, and why we're not already getting equal prize money," Jabeur added.



Martina Navratilova won a record nine Wimbledon singles titles.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of Navratilova embarking on an unprecedented 74-match winning streak, which landed her 10 regular tour titles, in addition to three grand slams.

"On the tour, away from the slams ... I worked just as hard in all the other tournaments," said Navratilova, who was speaking to Laureus Spirit of Sport.

"As women athletes, we had to make sure our tour was a success. If the men's sponsor walked away, they [would] find 20 more. For women, if we failed then that might be it. We felt a responsibility to support the tour, and make sure the sponsors were happy, which meant playing more than we wanted to."

Navratilova estimated that at Novak Djokovic's current age of 37, she had played roughly 600 more singles matches, and 800 more doubles matches, than the men's record 24-time grand slam champion.

Djokovic is poised to begin his bid for a record-equalling eighth Wimbledon men's singles title against Vit Kopriva tomorrow, after signalling his recovery from a knee injury in an exhibition victory over world No 5 Daniil Medvedev on Friday.

Kopriva's Czech compatriot Marketa Vondrousova, meanwhile, will begin her women's title defence against Jessica Bouzas of Spain tomorrow.

Navratilova, who was born in Czechoslovakia, but defected to the United States in 1975, said she was "pulling for" Tunisian Jabeur, as she tried to become the first African major winner in last year's Wimbledon final.

"That pressure got to her, on the other hand, Marketa, I think, was planning on flying home after the first round," Navratilova, a record nine-time Wimbledon singles champion, said. "We Czechs have a game that can adapt to any surface ... in the final she just didn't get nervous."

Swiatek won her first major as a 19-year-old at the 2020 French Open. She has five grand slam titles, but has not gone beyond the quarter-finals at Wimbledon.

"Iga is the most consistent player out there," Navratilova said. "She's a student of the game, and ... has the fire in her belly. Even if she doesn't change anything, she'll win a lot more majors. But if she improves, watch out."

Gauff broke her grand slam duck at last year's US Open, but the 20-year-old world No 2 has never gone beyond the third round at Wimbledon.

"She's been a phenom since she was about 12, expected to be that champion," Navratilova said. "I think she felt she wasn't quite living up to the hype for a while, but now she's won the US Open that pressure is off."

RADUCANU 'IN A REALLY GOOD SPOT' AS SHE PREPARES FOR RETURN TO HER HOME GRAND SLAM TOURNAMENT

Emma Raducanu feels physically ready for her Wimbledon return after conceding she struggled to adapt to blustery conditions during her comprehensive Eastbourne quarter-final defeat by Daria Kasatkina.

The 2021 US Open champion, who missed the entire 2023 grass-court season following wrist and ankle surgery, has received a wild card for her home grand slam, which begins tomorrow.

Having reached the semi-finals of the Nottingham Open earlier this month, her competitive preparation for the All England Club concluded with a resounding 6-2, 6-2 loss to world No 14 Kasatkina.

The 21-year-old, who registered impressive wins over Sloane Stephens and Jessica Pegula in the previous rounds of the Rothesay International, dismissed any concerns about her fitness.

"I wasn't tired at all. I was feeling really good," she said. "I think I just dealt with the circumstances badly. Yeah, I was very inflexible in my approach. That's my honest reflection of the match.

"But physically I'm in a really good spot. I'm fine. I just need to learn to be more willing to adapt. I hadn't really played many matches in that level of wind.

"Daria [Kasatkina] actually plays really good in those conditions, because she makes it very awkward for the opponent. I just think she handled it a lot better."

Raducanu began the week by declaring herself back in love with tennis before impressively overcoming American duo Stephens and Pegula.

But, with the second of those victories a gruelling, three-set affair, she failed to get to grips with Russian sixth seed Kasatkina as she followed fellow Britons Katie Boulter and Harriet Dart in suffering straight-sets elimination.

Deutsche Presse-Agentur

FOOTBALL

Georgia next exam for Spanish young gun Yamal

16-year-old achieves school grades and could become youngest goalscorer in Euros history

Agence France-Presse

Spain are focused on defeating debutants Georgia tonight to reach the Euro 2024 quarter-finals and so is 16-year-old sensation Lamine Yamal after receiving some good news to clear his head.

Before La Roja tackle their last-16 assignment in Cologne, Yamal discovered he had passed his own – the country's compulsory end of secondary school exams.



Everything we've done in the group phase serves for nothing if ... they knock us out

LAMINE YAMAL

Still studying when the tournament began in Germany, he shone in Spain's first two matches and was rested for most of the third with the team already through top of Group B.

While thoughts started to drift towards the knockout rounds, Spain's right winger was still waiting on his results.

"I came out from the training session and was told it all went well," Yamal told Spanish radio station Onda Cero. "I passed the exams and I have the ESO title now. I saw the grades on my phone and it said I had passed so I ... called my mum and told her."

Spain aced their "group of death" examination, overcoming Croatia, Italy and Albania to finish the opening phase with a 100 per cent record and clean sheets.

No other team managed either feat and after Spain came into the tournament without the favourites tag worn by France and England, now many are starting to believe in La Roja.

"Everything we've done in the group phase serves for nothing if on Sunday they knock us out," Yamal warned. "We have played against them before, but we know that it won't be the same game."

Spain thrashed Georgia 7-1 in Euros qualifying last September, in a match where Yamal became the country's youngest ever player and goalscorer at barely 16.

If the Barcelona winger, who turns 17 on July 13, the day before the Euros final, manages to find the net against Georgia or any prospective future rounds, he will become the youngest goalscorer in Euros history.

The record is currently held by Switzerland's Johan Vonlanthen, who scored at 18 in 2004, whisking it away from England's Wayne Rooney just four days after he had claimed it.

Joint record three-time winners Spain dominated international football between their 2008 and 2012 Euros triumphs, playing possession football and dominating their opponents with the ball.

In the years since they tried to attempt the same but the world had grown used to it and Spain struggled badly. But now they have the cutting edge back.



Spain's Lamine Yamal (centre) has a bit of fun with teammates at a training session yesterday. Photo: AP

WE NEED TO GIVE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT TO SEE, GORDON SAYS

England manager Gareth Southgate has pinpointed expectation for the festering unease among his side's travelling support but demand on the Three Lions to deliver at Euro 2024 has only risen after landing in the soft side of the draw.

Southgate's men begin what they hope will be a road to Berlin for the final on July 14 against Slovakia in Gelsenkirchen tonight. A rematch of the Euro 2020 final with Italy or Switzerland would then await in the quarters, while Austria, Turkey, the Netherlands or Romania are potential semi-final opponents.

There has been little in England's performances in Germany so far to justify their hype as the pre-tournament favourites. But with Germany, France, Spain and Portugal all on the other side of the draw, the pressure has intensified on a richly-talented squad to finally start performing.

"If people are being negative, it's only because they expect a lot from you, which is a positive thing," said Newcastle winger Anthony Gordon, who could be one of the changes Southgate turns to.

"If we want that to stop, we just need to perform and give people what they want to see." Despite topping Group C, England have managed only two goals in their opening three games.

The quartet of Phil Foden, Jude Bellingham, Bukayo Saka and Harry Kane combined for 114 goals in club football in the 2023-24 campaign. But together they have been a disjointed attacking unit that Southgate is under huge pressure to shake up.

Foden has rejoined the squad after flying back home to attend the birth of his third child. However, his lack of time on the training field over the past week may mean the Premier League's player of the year is the fall guy to try to balance the attack.

England's lack of width on the left has been exposed by Southgate having no natural left back available because of Luke Shaw's injury and Foden's tendency to drift inside. Gordon now looks set to be handed his chance. "My main strength is that I'm very direct. I'm obviously quick, so I'm a nightmare for anyone I play against," Gordon said.

Agence France-Presse

RACING

Visitors strive to continue Irish Classics monopoly in Derby at the Curragh

Staff Reporter

British trained horses have mopped up both the 2024 Irish Classics so far and it could be more of the same in the Group One Irish Derby (2,400m) at the Curragh tonight.

It was the Richard Hannon-trained Rosallion who captured last month's Group One Irish 2,000 Guineas (1,600m), with Karl Burke's Fallen Angel taking the Group One Irish 1,000 Guineas (1,600m) a day later.

This time it will be James Fanshawe's Ambiente Friendly and the Roger Varian-trained Matsuri with strong British claims in the eight-runner field offering €725,000 (HK$6.1 million) to the winner.

They must outrun Los Angeles from Aidan O'Brien's extraordinary Ballydoyle stable, with its equally extraordinary record in Ireland's premier Classic, having won it 15 times.

Of O'Brien's other three contenders, Euphoric looks most likely to push the pace.

Ambiente Friendly and Los Angeles – jumping from gates six and three, respectively – both delivered super performances in this month's Group One Epsom Derby (2,405m), though neither could cope with the devastating acceleration of City Of Troy with Ambiente Friendly 2.75 lengths away in second and Los Angeles another 3.25 lengths back in third.

Recent years have seen a strong record of horses placed at Epsom going on to win at the Curragh. Perhaps the prime question now is whether Ambiente Friendly can maintain his edge over Los Angeles 29 days later and at a right-handed galloping track that does not have a huge amount in common with a left-handed Epsom renowned for its cambers and gradients.

"I think the Curragh suits every horse and it should certainly suit Los Angeles, who is a very big colt. We always thought that he would get better and better as the season progresses and he seems to have come forward nicely again since Epsom," O'Brien said.

Fanshawe also expressed confidence in his colt's condition while summing up Ambiente Friendly's acute upwards profile: "He really came into his own in the Derby Trial Stakes (2,321m) at Lingfield in May and then showed further progress at Epsom."

Matsuri has none of the big-race experience of Ambiente Friendly or Los Angeles, with trainer Varian running out of time to get him to Epsom, but instead this unexposed colt pulverised eight rivals in a 2,000m novices' event at Leicester.

And the trainer was satisfied with Matsuri doing smart work over 1,600m at Newmarket.

SIMULCAST OVERSEAS RACES

IRISH DERBY DAY

S1 Race 1 — Maddenstown Handicap - 1,800m (Turf) — 8.10pm

No	Horse name	Wt.	Trainer	R. Odds	Jockey	Draw
1	Arabic Legend	138	Karl Burke	10	Clifford Lee	8
2	Princess Child	137	Joseph O'Brien	8	Dylan McMonagle	6
3	Formal Display	135	Ger Lyons	8	Gary Carroll	2
4	Sharinay	135	M Halford & T Collins	3.5	Ronan Whelan	3
5	Soldier's Empire	130	Ger Lyons	7	Colin Keane	1
6	Ridhaz	126	M Halford & T Collins	8	Ben Coen	7
7	Thor's Hammer	125	John Murtagh	8	John Velazquez	4
8	Signor Ferrari	119	John Feane	30	Wayne Hassett (-5)	5

S1 Race 2 — Railway Stakes - 1,200m (Turf) — 8.40pm

No	Horse name	Wt.	Trainer	R. Odds	Jockey	Draw
1	Arizona Blaze	131	Adrian Murray	7	David Egan	4
2	Henri Matisse	131	Aidan O'Brien	4.5	Wayne Lordan	5
3	Principality	131	Richard Hannon	15	Sean Levey	1
4	Red Evolution	131	Michael O'Callaghan	20	Colin Keane	3
5	The Parthenon	131	Aidan O'Brien	20	Declan McDonogh	7
6	The Strikin Viking	131	Kevin Ryan	4.5	Tom Eaves	6
7	Tunbridge Wells	131	Aidan O'Brien	2.8	Ryan Moore	2

S1 Race 3 — Belgrave Stakes - 1,200m (Turf) — 9.15pm

No	Horse name	Wt.	Trainer	R. Odds	Jockey	Draw
1	Commanche Falls	138	Michael Dods	2	Connor Beasley	4
2	Dandyville	133	M G Quinn	20	Gavin Ryan	5
3	Tango Flare	133	Patrick Foley	12	Seamie Heffernan	8
4	Ano Syra	128	John Feane	5	Dylan McMonagle	1
5	Pink Sorrel	128	Joseph G Murphy	35	Gary Carroll	7
6	Sister Lola	128	Adrian Sexton	100	Wesley Joyce	2
7	Jakajaro	126	David Marnane	15	Luke McAteer	6
8	My Mate Alfie	126	Ger Lyons	6	Colin Keane	3

S1 Race 4 — Rockingham Handicap - 1,000m (Turf) — 9.50pm

No	Horse name	Wt.	Trainer	R. Odds	Jockey	Draw
1	Korker	140	Karl Burke	10	Clifford Lee	8
2	Thunderbear	140	Jack Davison	11	Colin Keane	12
3	Twilight Jet	139	Michael O'Callaghan	15	John Velazquez	2
4	Big Gossey	133	Charles O'Brien	40	Gary Carroll	16
5	So Majestic	130	Kate McGivern	20	Dylan McMonagle	17
6	Amazon Lady	128	Willie McCreery	15	Billy Lee	1
7	Arnhem	127	M G Quinn	35	Gavin Ryan	5
8	Little Queenie	126	Paul Flynn	7	Robert Whearty (-5)	10
9	Jm Jungle	124	John & Sean Quinn	11	Jason Hart	6
10	Sturlasson	121	Kieran Cotter	7	Oisin Murphy	14
11	Harry's Hill	119	Martin Hassett	22	Wayne Hassett (-5)	4
12	Lethal Nymph	119	Paul Midgley	11	Joe Fanning	7
13	Shandy	119	J A Stack	22	Wayne Lordan	15
14	Kendall Roy	119	Kate McGivern	7	Chris Hayes	3
15	Greek Flower	119	John Feane	30	Jamie Powell (-3)	9
16	Bold Optimist	119	Daniel McLoughlin	50	Keithen Kennedy (-7)	11
17	Reinforce	119	Katy Brown	100	Wesley Joyce (-5)	13

S1 Race 5 — Celebration Stakes - 1,600m (Turf) — 10.25pm

No	Horse name	Wt.	Trainer	R. Odds	Jockey	Draw
1	Lord Massusus	140	Joseph G Murphy	6	Gary Carroll	6
2	Dunum	135	Natalia Lupini	5.5	Billy Lee	4
3	Atlantic Coast	130	Joseph O'Brien	12	Dylan McMonagle	2
4	Romina Power	130	Joseph O'Brien	35	Declan McDonogh	5
5	You Send Me	130	J A Stack	9	Seamie Heffernan	9
6	Master Of The Hunt	125	Aidan O'Brien	16	Wayne Lordan	3
7	Mundi	125	Aidan O'Brien	5	Ryan Moore	7
8	Norwalk Havoc	125	Mrs John Harrington	16	Shane Foley	1
9	Azada	120	Dermot Weld	3.5	Chris Hayes	8

S1 Race 6 — Irish Derby - 2,400m (Turf) — 11.05pm

No	Horse name	Wt.	Trainer	R. Odds	Jockey	Draw
1	Ambiente Friendly	128	James Fanshawe	2.3	Robert Havlin	6
2	Euphoric	128	Aidan O'Brien	35	Declan McDonogh	7
3	Grosvenor Square	128	Aidan O'Brien	15	Wayne Lordan	1
4	Keeper's Heart	128	Ger Lyons	70	Colin Keane	5
5	Los Angeles	128	Aidan O'Brien	2.4	Ryan Moore	3
6	Matsuri	128	Roger Varian	7	James Doyle	2
7	Sunway	128	David Menuisier	20	Oisin Murphy	8
8	The Euphrates	128	Aidan O'Brien	60	Dylan McMonagle	4

S1 Race 7 — Derby Festival Handicap - 1,600m(Turf) — 11.40pm

No	Horse name	Wt.	Trainer	R. Odds	Jockey	Draw
1	Coeur d'Or	140	Dermot Weld	9	Chris Hayes	5
2	Blues Emperor	135	John Murtagh	10	Rory Mulligan (-7)	9
3	State Actor	134	W T Farrell	5	Colin Keane	3
4	Shayzann	133	John Murtagh	9	Ben Coen	6
5	Cheers Again	130	Paul Flynn	7	Dylan McMonagle	15
6	Booyea	128	Thomas Gibney	12	Gavin Ryan	1
7	Casanova	127	Adrian McGuinness	12	Adam Caffrey (-3)	13
8	Physique	125	Micky Fenton	12	Oisin Murphy	10
9	No More Porter	122	Adrian McGuinness	28	Ronan Whelan	8
10	Verhoyen	122	Michael Grassick	20	Danny Sheehy	2
11	Benavente	120	Kevin Coleman	25	Wayne Lordan	7
12	Morse	120	Charles Weld	6	Niall McCullagh	11
13	Brains	119	R Donohoe	25	Wayne Hassett (-5)	14
14	Concluding Call	119	Willie McCreery	20	Nathan Crosse	12
15	May Night	119	Denis Hogan	18	John Velazquez	4

S1 Race 8 — Summer Fillies Handicap - 1,400m (Turf) — 12.15am

No	Horse name	Wt.	Trainer	R. Odds	Jockey	Draw
1	Mammas Girl	140	Adrian Murray	30	David Egan	16
2	Dance Night Andday	139	Ross O'Sullivan	6	Colin Keane	5
3	Vasda	133	Joseph O'Brien	18	Declan McDonogh	6
4	Fast Tara	132	Joseph O'Brien	6	Dylan McMonagle	15
5	Kayhana	131	Dermot Weld	6	Chris Hayes	2
6	Plume Noire	130	Brian Duffy	9	James Ryan (-5)	7
7	Coumshingaun	128	Kevin Coleman	16	Seamie Heffernan	11
8	Gunzburg	127	Gavin Cromwell	9	Gary Carroll	10
9	Dagoda	124	Jennifer Lynch	15	Oisin Murphy	14
10	Ojw Legacy	121	Andrew Slattery	9	Andrew J Slattery	13
11	Indigo Five	119	John Feane	18	Wesley Joyce (-5)	8
12	Talia	119	Natalia Lupini	20	Wayne Lordan	12
13	Matter Of Fact	119	Mrs John Harrington	30	Nathan Crosse	9
14	Raknah	119	Mrs John Harrington	20	Keithen Kennedy (-7)	4
15	Karlsberg	119	Shane Crawley	30	Jamie Powell (-3)	3
16	Profit Refused	119	Kevin Prendergast	60	Rory Cleary	1

S1 Race 9 — Ragusa Handicap - 2,400m (Turf) — 12.50am

No	Horse name	Wt.	Trainer	R. Odds	Jockey	Draw
1	Safecracker	141	John Murtagh	16	Ben Coen	6
2	Star Harbour	136	Adrian McGuinness	15	Adam Caffrey (-3)	5
3	Dame Rapide	133	James M Barrett	40	Luke McAteer	9
4	Saturn	132	Mrs John Harrington	3	Shane Foley	10
5	Zoffman	131	Noel Meade	12	Colin Keane	8
6	Mt Leinster	130	John McConnell	80	Donagh O'Connor	2
7	War Correspondent	129	Ray Cody	11	Billy Lee	11
8	Lot Of Joy	128	Willie Mullins	8	James Doyle	1
9	Ceallach	127	M Halford & T Collins	30	Ronan Whelan	3
10	Intellotto	127	Joseph O'Brien	4	Dylan McMonagle	12
11	Pinot Gris	123	Gavin Cromwell	7	Gary Carroll	7
12	Carlo Bianconi	119	Joseph O'Brien	11	John Velazquez	4

Notes: S1 race 1 - 9 will simulcast from Curragh Racecourse, Ireland

How a drink tastes can be forgotten quickly, but by talking to people, you give them a different and unforgettable experience, and that can be more important than making a drink

LOK CHEUNG, BAR MANAGER AT COA, EXPLAINS HOW CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE HELPED HIM WIN THE VIUTV REALITY SERIES *MASTER MIXOLOGIST* > DRINK A14



ENTERTAINMENT


Ewan McGregor stars in *A Gentleman in Moscow*. Photo: Paramount+

Hairs and graces

Actor Ewan McGregor says he loved his latest role as an aristocrat in the TV miniseries 'A Gentleman in Moscow' but hated his moustache, and how he is happy to feel his age

Tribune News Service

Ewan McGregor is swiping through his camera roll, looking for the picture that explains why he will never grow another moustache – unless a job requires it. And even then, he would probably argue that the character should be clean-shaven. Dalí without a moustache? Surreal.

It seems many of the interviews he has done to promote his series *A Gentleman in Moscow*, streaming on Paramount+, Hulu and Apple TV+, have spent a lot of time on the moustache he grew to play Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov – a Russian nobleman sentenced to house arrest in a hotel following the 1917 Bolshevik revolution.

Over four decades and eight episodes, he learns to appreciate simple pleasures and embrace family. But he never shaves off the moustache.

McGregor keeps scrolling. He is in the US state of Atlanta, filming *Flowervale Street*, a film so secret that when he mentions its name, he immediately panics.

"Oh, no. I'm worried that I just blew the title." He is relieved when told it is already out there.

He wrapped shooting at 6.30am, and here he is on Zoom, 4½ hours later. "I'm somewhat upside down, but it's all good," he says.

He finds the photo. He is with his son, Laurie, who was just shy of three years old when it was taken. McGregor's hair is light brown. His moustache is blond.

He grimaces, saying: "There's something about my blondie moustache that doesn't look good on my face."

The picture was taken last year during the actors' strike, which interrupted the filming of *A Gentleman in Moscow* with eight days left on the schedule.

During the break, McGregor kept the moustache and waited. When shooting resumed in January, he finished his scenes and shaved it all off five minutes after production wrapped.

"There's me in the make-up chair," McGregor says with glee, finding another photo in his camera roll. "Once it goes white, maybe. Then I think it might look good."


Ewan McGregor as Obi-Wan Kenobi in *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace.* Photo: Lucas Films

> The experience of making this show is why I wanted to be an actor
>
> EWAN McGREGOR

Best known to audiences for playing Obi-Wan Kenobi in the three Star Wars prequels, McGregor returned to the role for a 2022 Disney+ limited series. Shortly before this interview, he surprised fans attending a 25th anniversary showing of *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace* at the Atlanta Film Festival.

He likes doing these kinds of drop-ins. A few years ago, he showed up at El Capitan Theatre in Hollywood, in California, at 2am between films in a Star Wars marathon.

"They're all in sleeping bags and blankets," McGregor says. "It's a good laugh. And it's good for the ego when they give you a big cheer when they weren't expecting you."

Critics mostly hated *The Phantom Menace* on its release, but the George Lucas-directed feature has been reassessed as the years have passed.

"We made the film for kids, but we didn't hear from them then because they were kids and there was no Instagram, no social media. They didn't have a voice like they do now," McGregor says.

"All we had was the critics and the noise of the people who didn't like it. But those kids have grown up, and those movies are now their Star Wars trilogy. It's nice for me, that. Because at the time, the reaction was rough."

We get to talking about the idea, explored in *A Gentleman in Moscow*, that less is more and the contentment that comes from casting aside what no longer serves us.

"You realise what things are not you," McGregor says. "I'm 53. But I've got lots of friends who are about to be 60. And I keep noticing, watching shows on television, young people referencing 60 like it's really old!" He stops, laughing.

"You're like, 'Wait a minute'. But it's also learning about who you are, isn't it? And you let go of the things that you don't need."

The funny thing about McGregor is that he is someone who picks up hobbies quickly, becomes obsessed with them and then moves on to the next thing, never quite letting them go. He can ride a unicycle. He can play the guitar. He can blow a few tunes on the bagpipes. There is always something going on.

It used to be that he would beat himself up over knowing how to do a lot of things moderately well as opposed to mastering a single talent. Now he just accepts that is how he is.

He can go out to his shed, look at the unicycle he has not used for three years and know that someday he will give it another go.

What about the bagpipes? Are they in the corner somewhere, gathering dust?

"They are at the moment," McGregor says. "But they will get blown again."

It turns out McGregor is even more interested in talking about the bagpipes than about his Moscow moustache.

It was not that long ago, in fact, that he broke out his bagpipes. This last year, he was in his native Scotland for Hogmanay, the country's New Year celebration. He was out with his brother, who repeatedly called out for songs that McGregor did not know. "C'mon, shut up. I don't know that one," McGregor kept telling him.

When he was a child, McGregor was a drummer in a pipe band. He never thought he would be a piper because as a drummer, that would be, in his words, "going over to the dark side".

But when he was shooting the 2011 film *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* in the Scottish Highlands, he met a piper and bought some bagpipes and found a teacher in London. He took the pipes with him to the set of his next film and asked for his trailer to be put next to the generator.

"I'm the first actor in history to ask that, because usually you want to be as far away from the generator as possible because it's so noisy," McGregor says.

"But it was perfect because I could blow my bagpipes for hours on end and no one could hear it because I was next to the drone of the generator."

> I feel 53. I feel exactly where I am. I don't want to be 35. I want to feel the age that I am
>
> EWAN McGREGOR

Hearing these stories, it is easy to see why McGregor loved *A Gentleman in Moscow*, a series that asked him to learn how to do a number of different things – age a character over decades, play a father and a lover, explore the inner life of a man well versed in grief and loss who never loses his zest for life.

"The experience of making this show is why I wanted to be an actor," McGregor says.

"It's such a beautiful piece; it leaves you thinking, 'God, I hope there's another one out there somewhere in the future.' But who knows?"

"He's so charming, but I resist using that word because it's reductive," says *A Gentleman in Moscow* producer Ben Vanstone. "There's so much thought and skill that goes into his performance, all of his performances, really."

Vanstone says McGregor's count ages 31 years in the series, not including what we see of the character in childhood flashbacks. But because the character's mental burdens grow lighter over time, McGregor believes he becomes more relaxed and, in many ways, younger. He learns to live.

Going back to what he said earlier about young people calling his friends almost ancient at 60, how old does McGregor feel these days?

"I feel 53. I feel exactly where I am," he says. "I don't want to be 35. I want to feel the age that I am."

Is that because he would not trade the wisdom and experiences he's accumulated to shave off a few years?

"No, I wouldn't," McGregor says. "I'm not afraid of ageing. I'm not afraid of getting older. I'm not afraid of dying. I'm just so happy. I'm a lucky, lucky man."


Ewan McGregor and Amr Waked in *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen.* Photo: Lionsgate

DRINK

Champion barman blends HK story into his cocktails

Coa's Lok Cheung says connecting his inventive cocktails to the city helped him win TV series

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Master Mixologist, Hong Kong's first televised cocktail-making competition, set the bar high.

Running from June 10 to 21 on ViuTV and featuring 32 participants – from professional bartenders to amateur talent – the series shone a spotlight on Hong Kong's competitive bar scene.

The judging panel comprised three well-known veterans of the city's bar industry: Antonio Lai, award-winning bartender and founder of Quinary; Cecilia Wong, wine and spirits writer and host of ViuTV talk show *Chit Chat Drink*; and Jay Khan, co-founder and beverage director of Coa, a three-time winner of Asia's 50 Best Bars.

One contestant took home the "master mixologist" title following individual contests, group challenges and rank matches in 10 episodes shot over three months, with some scores coming from public votes.

Episodes eight and nine saw the six remaining participants head to Vietnam for contests in which they had to replicate a speciality cocktail from scratch and create a cocktail based on local Vietnamese ingredients.

Wong says the judges assessed drinks from different angles: "Antonio [Lai] was more on the technical side, Jay [Khan] was more on improving the flavours and I focused more on the presentation. But of course, we had other [criteria] as well."

Lai says his requirements for a masterful cocktail included "a combination of performance, knowledge, style and experience", while Khan "wanted to see the bartenders making bold decisions and creating something outside the norm", with storytelling being another crucial aspect for him.

The competition's final started with the three remaining contestants – Quinary's Eartha Sim, The Savory Project's Cheung Chi-ho, and Coa's Lok Cheung – creating cocktails inspired by "the taste of Hongkongers" and cha chaan teng culture.

The two survivors, Ho and Cheung, went on to design pop-up bars depicting their own vision and philosophy, from which they served a final cocktail to summarise their experience in the competition. It was Cheung – who has worked as Coa's bar manager since 2021 – who took the title.

"His cocktail was more complex and [he had] more consistent storytelling throughout his whole journey [on the show]," Wong says.


Lok Cheung's winning concoction from *Master Mixologist*.



> I tried my best ... showed what I wanted to show and said what I wanted to say
>
> LOK CHEUNG

Lai says Cheung "consistently demonstrated excellence" throughout the competition, with "captivating cocktail presentations which ultimately led to our decision to select him".

Khan – the co-founder of Coa – was no stranger to Cheung's craft and says he was among the most experienced on the show.

"Watching him win was a proud moment for our entire team. As a colleague, I can say he is a very hard worker," he says, adding many of the other participants showed perseverance, determination and a hunger to succeed.

Both Wong and Lai singled out one of the six finalists – Christina Limbu of Coa and its sister venture The Savory Project – as the contestant whose outstanding performance surprised them the most, while finalist Sim's inventive use of ingredients and garnishes made an impression on Wong.

But it was Cheung's "Bartender's Bartender" cocktail and presentation in the third round, about the ups and downs he experienced throughout his career, that brought Wong to tears: "I could taste his emotions and passion as a mixologist."

Cheung says he first dipped his toes into the food and beverage industry as a server around 2011 but, at that point, it was nothing more than "having fun and enjoying a drink or two".

While he did enrol in an amateur mixologist course before becoming a bartender, he believes the best way to learn is through practice and observation.

"It was only when I started working at a cocktail bar a couple of years later that I got into making artisanal drinks and began to enjoy the culture and professionalism that came with it, as well as interacting with customers," he says.

He worked with Lai for about five years, during which time he took part in competitions. While things were going well, he started to feel stagnant and realised he needed to expand his horizons.

"I felt a bit lost," he says.

"I had spent a few years in the bar scene yet couldn't figure out which direction I wanted to head towards."

In 2019 he left Hong Kong for London, where he started as a bartender in a five-star hotel. In just his first year he was promoted to take charge of operations for the hotel's three bars.

He attributes his two years in London to helping him ground and find himself. "I came back with fresh eyes and began to know where I wanted to head."

On his return, in 2021, he quickly joined Coa.

He says creating new cocktails is fun because you get to innovate and escape your usual mindset, but there's an more fulfilling part of the bartending experience.

"Most of a bartender's day-to-day is customer-facing – that, I think, is the most appealing aspect of the job," he says.

"How a drink tastes can be forgotten quickly, but by talking to people, you give them a different and unforgettable experience, and that can be more important than making a drink. After all, making a good drink is expected of a professional bartender."

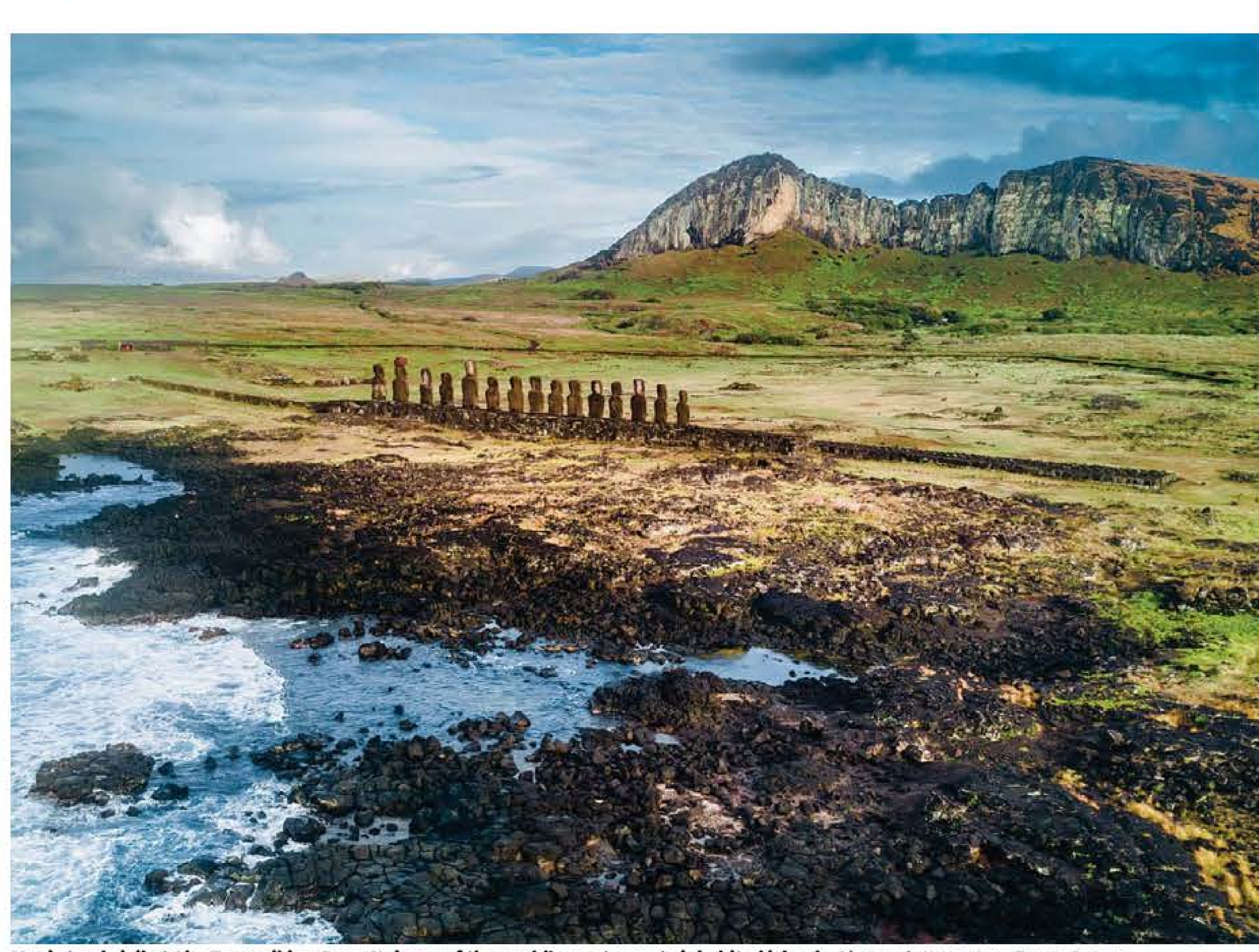
Cheung decided to take part in Master Mixologist as "it's a meaningful competition and Hong Kong's first TV show about the local bar industry".

"I didn't expect [to do] much aside from helping more people discover the craft and the local cocktail scene. I tried my best at every round, showed what I wanted to show and said what I wanted to say."

He admits that with more than 12 years behind the bar he was more experienced than most contestants, but he thought that everyone was creative with their cocktails. "I focused more on storytelling and presentation, and thematically I tried to connect everything back to Hong Kong, which was why I took part in this competition in the first place: to promote the local bar industry."


Mixologist and bar manager Lok Cheung at Coa in Central. Photos: Xiaomei Chen, ViuTV

TRAVEL


Moai stand vigil at Ahu Tongariki on Rapa Nui, one of the world's most remote inhabited islands. Photos: Getty Images, Teresa Bergen

REMOTE ISLAND REMAINS SHROUDED IN MYSTERY

Giant stone heads watch over Rapa Nui, or Easter Island, where visitors can hike, bike, snorkel, learn of its history, and maybe even catch sight of a UFO

Teresa Bergen
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I am perched above the kilometre-wide crater of Rano Kau, on the island of Rapa Nui, also known as Easter Island, staring down at a lake thick with green algae.

In between tales of bloody wars and cutthroat physical competitions, my guide, Hanga Eka, describes a UFO sighting over the crater. "I have seen crazy things," he says.

It feels a little crazy to have taken a long, expensive trip to see one of the world's most remote inhabited islands.

Rapa Nui is 3,540km off the coast of the South American country of Chile, which annexed it in 1888. If your ideal holiday involves hiking on gently sloping green hills while being watched by huge stone heads – imposing relics of a mysterious past – visiting Rapa Nui is money well spent.

Visitors not arriving by cruise ship fly in from Santiago, Chile's capital city, on LatAm Airlines, the only airline serving the island.

The palm trees and sea breeze outside the airport, which has a thatched roof decorated with bird motifs, make it feels as though you have left Chile for Polynesia – which is where the island's original settlers came from, between 400AD and 800AD.

They developed their culture in isolation until Easter Sunday, 1721, when Dutch explorer Jacob Roggeveen stumbled on the small, triangular island.

The airport is in the island's only town, Hanga Roa, where about 95 per cent of Rapa Nui's 8,000 inhabitants live. A collection of low buildings, some with thatched roofs, beside a harbour, Hanga Roa is definitely a tourist town, with lots of tour agencies, restaurants, outfitters and large handicraft and souvenir markets. Elsewhere, at the Holy Cross Church, the Virgin Mary statue wears a crown of birds, the Holy Spirit is represented as a frigate bird rather than a dove, and people sing hymns in the Rapa Nui language.

My four-night stay at the all-inclusive Explora Rapa Nui lodge, 6.5km northeast of Hanga Roa, includes a room with an ocean view, meals full of fresh vegetables – more than you expect to be served on a remote island – and daily guided excursions, such as hiking, biking and snorkelling.

Visitors who crave more autonomy can rent a car or bicycle to get around the hilly, 164 sq km island. The roads are not busy but they are bumpy and slippery after rain, so biking is recommended for experienced cyclists only.

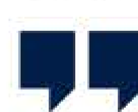
I brace myself against strong wind gusts as my small group hikes through the Rano Raraku hillside quarry. It was here that the enormous heads and torsos, called moai, were carved out of tuff – rock formed by volcanic ash or dust – between 1100 and 1650 (estimates vary wildly).

Moai tower over us in various states of completion, staring through empty eye sockets. The largest lies gazing skyward, 22 metres long, his face clearly visible, his back still attached to the hillside.

Each moai depicts a leader, his stone figure watching over his village after he dies. The biggest Rapa Nui mystery is how these giant sculptures – which weigh an average of 12.5 tonnes – were moved from the quarry around the island.

Guide Ricky Clementi passionately defends the theory that groups of men wrapped ropes around moai and used momentum and a rocking motion until the statues seemed to be walking.


A tour party visits Rano Raraku, the moai quarry.



> The biggest mystery is how these giant sculptures ... were moved from the quarry around the island

I am disappointed when the sea is deemed too dangerous for diving and snorkelling, which is a fairly common occurrence.

Every day of my stay becomes a hiking day, and every hike takes in Rapa Nui culture. My tour groups never number more than seven people, and we travel by van across the island. Explora arranges outings at less busy times of the day, so nowhere feels crowded.

Almost half the island is designated a national park, in which visitors have a guide. Good ones make all the difference; many tourists must leave Rapa Nui feeling like anthropologists.

Piles of rocks are seldom just piles of rocks. Instead, they are the foundation of a boat-shaped sleeping structure, or a stone chicken coop, or a primitive observatory.

Fallen moai lie face down across the island. They had all been knocked over by the early 1800s, but some have been restored to an upright position.

Twenty-something guide Eka tells us that almost half of today's islanders are descended from the early Polynesian settlers.

Since the population reached a low of 111 in 1877 – reduced by war, slave raids from South America and exposure to Western diseases – intermarriage has been rife. Every time he liked a girl in school, says Eka, she turned out to be his cousin.

"That's the story of my life," he says, shaking his head.

Easter Island came to the world's attention in 1962 when pictures of moai appeared in National Geographic magazine. "Massive heads carved of stone stand vigil on this island so remote that the only visitors arrive aboard the annual supply ship," the accompanying article said.

Sixty years later, in 2022, arrivals had surged to 100,000 a year. With the tourists came a new interest among Rapa Nui people in their culture and in preserving their language.

As we stand looking at seven restored moai at a site called Ahu Akivi, guide Isabel Icka says her mother's generation, born into tourism, feels a much stronger connection to the moai than her grandmother ever did.

Although our guides deliver authoritative-sounding details, much of it is speculative and some questions remain unanswered – which Polynesian island did the original settlers come from? Why were the moai knocked down? And what was that triangular black craft Eka claims he and other islanders saw hovering over the volcano early one morning?

They only add to the allure of a destination that is ideal for lovers of a good mystery.

The writer's stay was provided by Explora Rapa Nui.

TRAVEL

Five famous sites hosting Paris Olympics events, and their histories

Agence France-Presse

The Paris Olympics have been designed to showcase the City of Light in all its splendour, with many events set to take place at some of its most famous locations.

These five sites – including one outside the French capital – are among those likely to wow ticket-holders, and a global television audience of billions, during the 17-day sporting extravaganza that starts on July 26.

1. Eiffel Tower

The most famous of the Paris landmarks, the Eiffel Tower will welcome one of the most popular Olympic events – beach volleyball.

The action will take place in a temporary venue near the foot of the "Iron Lady". The Champ de Mars park will host judo and wrestling.

Reviled by Parisians when it was unveiled in 1889 for the Paris Exhibition world's fair by engineer Gustave Eiffel, the Eiffel Tower has since become the capital's crown jewel.

Besides being one of the world's top tourist attractions, pulling in 7 million visitors a year, it is also a working telecoms tower, used for radio and television transmissions.

Winners at the Paris Games will all go home with a small part of the iron colossus. Each medal will contain an 18 gram crumb of original iron, removed during various renovations, melted down and reforged.

2. Grand Palais

Fencing and taekwondo battles will take place in the opulent setting of the Grand Palais art gallery, a glass-and-steel masterpiece created for the 1900 Paris Exposition.

Its distinctive feature is its beautiful glass domed roof, the largest of its kind in Europe, which covers a cavernous exhibition space of 13,500 square metres.

During World War I, the Grand Palais put its art collection in storage and converted its galleries into a military hospital.

In the 21st century, the airy nave has hosted giant installations commissioned from some of the world's leading artists.

It has also been flooded to make the biggest ice rink in the world.

3. Place de la Concorde

The vast paved square at the foot of the Champs-Elysees avenue will serve as an urban sports hub.

Skateboarding, 3x3 basketball, BMX freestyle and, in its first Games appearance, breakdancing, will all take place in the square, which is just across the Seine from the Invalides war museum where Napoleon is buried.

The square's harmonious name conceals a bloody past – King Louis XVI and his wife Marie Antoinette were among hundreds of people who were guillotined there in 1793 during the so-called Reign of Terror that followed the 1789 French revolution.

The largest square in Paris is defined by its huge gold obelisk, one of a pair erected by pharaoh Ramses II outside the temple in Luxor, Egypt, which was gifted to Paris in 1830.

4. Versailles Palace

Dressage and showjumping will take place in the royal park of Versailles Palace, some 20km from central Paris, which will also feature on the marathon circuit and host the cross-country and pentathlon events.

Originally a hunting lodge, "Sun King" Louis XIV in the 17th century transformed Versailles into the home of French royalty, where he lived with 10,000 staff – enough to fill a town.


The fountain at Place de la Concorde; and the Eiffel Tower. Photos: Shutterstock, AFP

The vast palace gardens include a 1.5km-long canal that once hosted his extravagant parties, complete with sailing gondolas. Since 1979 it has been a Unesco World Heritage site.

5. Marseilles

Not all events will be held in the capital. Sailing contests will take place in the Mediterranean city of Marseilles, France's boisterous, big-hearted second city, the home of the Olympique Marseille football team.

More than 300 sailors from across the world will battle it out in the waters of the Mediterranean east of the city, where a new marina has been built on the Corniche coastal road.

It is unlikely they will have Marseilles' mighty mistral wind in their sails, however – it usually blows in winter and spring.

Marseilles, which will also host 10 football matches, was where the Olympic torch relay began in France on May 8.

OPINION

EDITORIAL

Prepare well so the city can benefit from hydrogen advances

Moving ahead with the times may not necessarily be the Hong Kong government's forte, though efforts have been made to narrow the gaps. The application of green hydrogen energy is a case in point. After Beijing published an ambitious road map in 2020 to develop the hydrogen economy, local officials are catching up with a blueprint on the promising new energy, which, hopefully, will pave the way for its wider use in the city while helping reduce pollution and global warming.

Announcing the Hydrogen Strategy, Secretary for Environment and Ecology Tse Chin-wan said the city should seize the opportunities arising from developments in the nation and elsewhere in the world on this front. This would not just help achieve carbon neutrality, but also spur innovation and new economic growth.

The plan involves legislative amendments in the first half of 2025 to provide a legal basis for regulating the manufacture, storage, transport, supply and use of hydrogen as a fuel, and formulate a certification standard that aligns with international practices by 2027. The city, officials say, also can become a showcase for hydrogen energy development in the country, capitalising on its strengths as a "superconnector" and "super value-adder" for potential overseas and mainland businesses in developing the new energy.

China's ambitious drive on this front has given Hong Kong a strong footing to embrace the change. The mainland authorities further promulgated a medium- and long-term plan in 2022 to make hydrogen a key component of the national energy system in future. Meanwhile, a local government working group already has approved 14 trial projects. Promising as it is, hydrogen fuel is still in the early stages of development internationally. Some studies have questioned whether the energy is as clean and efficient as touted. Ultimately, the pace and scale of its use depends on whether it will be more cost effective than other renewable energies.

The government is well aware of the parameters and stresses the need for flexibility when taking the blueprint forward. The city also has to rely on the mainland for hydrogen supply and therefore cannot develop the hydrogen economy on its own.

Getting the relevant policy and the legislative framework in place is just the first step. Issues such as cost effectiveness, infrastructure, production and marketing makes wider application impossible in the short-run. Officials should closely monitor progress on the mainland and overseas and get the city ready. From local regulation and regional cooperation to more trials and financing, a clear road map is needed to show how Hong Kong can rise to the challenge and become a "showcase" on the hydrogen economy for the country.

Time to dust off plans for Disney expansion

The last few years of social unrest, pandemic and political reform followed by laboured economic recovery have not been fun, least of all for venues that depend on tourism and positive consumer vibes. There can be few sorrier examples than Hong Kong Disneyland, which suffered particularly as a result of business bans and social-distancing rules during the pandemic that forced it to close attractions.

So it is good, unexpected news that the 52 per cent Hong Kong government-owned theme park has just posted an 83 per cent reduction in losses to HK$356 million on the back of the post-pandemic recovery. In fact, a 156 per cent increase in revenue to HK$5.7 billion, as visitor numbers soared 87 per cent to 6.4 million, put it on course to avoid a decade of consecutive annual losses, following only three years of profit since it opened in 2005. That milestone seems even more likely after the March quarter this year, when Disney broke its record in financial indicators such as revenue, Ebitda and net profit, according to managing director Michael Moriarty. "We are back and have turned the corner," he said. A particularly pleasing aspect has been a strong rebound in mainland visitor numbers, which bettered those for the 2018 financial year, along with a strong showing from Southeast Asian tourists.

After nearly 20 years of mixed fortunes, this is no time for Hong Kong Disneyland to rest on newly earned laurels. It remains the smallest of all the Disney theme parks. To be sure, it sets itself apart from the much bigger Shanghai Disneyland and its Chinese characteristics with a more Western-oriented presentation. But the robust recovery signals time to dust off plans for development of the Penny's Bay site. Hong Kong Disney, after all, is on the cusp of its third decade in the city.

It has not always been easy for its American partner to adapt to an East-West market. But if it does not know its market by now, it should. If present trends continue, it stands to benefit along with Hong Kong from a massive investment by the local taxpayer. Integration of the city with the Greater Bay Area, and its estimated total population of 90 million, can only enhance a win-win prospect.

This is different

Anthony Rowley says doubts about the US' ability to manage its debt without stoking inflation are sparking fresh warnings about risks to the economy

Global financial crises sometimes seem to come out of nowhere. There is no obvious catalysing event like the collapse of a financial institution, just a frisson of market fear that grows until it accelerates into a panic. That is in the air now.

We have become accustomed to warnings about the steep escalation of US government debt, yet, still, the debt goes on growing and the world doesn't come to an end. But this time really is different in ways that could turn distress into disaster.

The US government debt crunch has migrated into the short-term end of the market, where crisis can come about more quickly, than at the long end. It's hard to see how borrowing can be shifted back again without stoking inflation, which is the last thing the US leadership wants.

The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post and the Financial Times, among others, have all turned their focus to the government debt issue in recent days, and not just because a presidential election is approaching. Fears run deeper than that.

Most explicit was the Financial Times' lead of June 22 warning of a "US borrowing binge". The article noted the US "will be forced to fund a massive increase in its budget deficit with short-term debt", with consequences for money markets and inflation.

"We are spending money as a country like a drunken sailor on shore for the weekend," it quoted Ajay Rajadhyaksha, global chair of research at Barclays, as saying.

Likewise, Gerald F. Seib wrote on June 21 in a Wall Street Journal commentary that "America is cruising into an uncharted sea of federal debt with a public seemingly untroubled by the stark numbers and a government seemingly incapable of turning them around". The Washington Post editorial board wrote on June 20 that the US "will soon break a record that has stood for 78 years", but because it has to do with federal debt, "this is not a cause for celebration".

It is not just media commentators who are bringing up US debt issues. The US Congressional Budget Office – an independent watchdog that produces analyses of economic issues to support the budget process – has raised its forecast for the US deficit to US$1.9 trillion in the current financial year, against US$1.5 trillion forecast in February.

Such figures are meaningless in the abstract, and some might argue that the size of the federal deficit doesn't matter anyway as government deficits are self-financing. But none of that will prevent a collapse of debt market confidence which will reverberate around the world.

Why? Unlike a stock market crash, real estate market slump or even a banking crisis whose impact can be contained, a US debt market collapse would be akin to the failure of the central nervous system of global finance.

In the words of the Securities Industry and Financial Markets Association, the US Treasury market is the "largest and most liquid bond market on the planet". It is "a bedrock of the global financial system" where there are US$27 trillion of US Treasuries outstanding.

The reason the US government will need to turn to the short-term debt market to finance a prospective record deficit is that it is having trouble issuing long-term debt without pushing up interest rates. That in turn would drive up inflation, which is something the US Federal Reserve is trying to bring down. In any case, money market funds that buy much of the short-term US Treasury debt are already overstuffed with such securities.

If the record amount of US government debt being issued now is not something to be proud of, neither is it something to be ashamed of, some would argue. One of those is Paul Sheard, a former Harvard scholar and vice-chairman of S&P Global. Sheard noted that the fact that the US or any other government "has to borrow in order to run a deficit is an artefact of the way (for good reasons) society has arranged monetary and fiscal institutions.

"At an underlying fundamental level, it is the other way round. The government in fact creates money when it runs a deficit, and when it issues government debt securities it turns that money into a different form. At a very macro level, government deficits are always self-financing."

That is a somewhat sophisticated argument that might not find ready acceptance or comprehension in the everyday rough and tumble of debt markets.

The more pertinent issue, he said, is that the Fed has missed its inflation target on the upside for more than three years now. This suggests that monetary and fiscal policy both need to be tightened to restrain demand and lower inflation.

"The important issue is not whether or not the federal government can finance its budget deficit – it can always do that – it is whether the fiscal policy stance is appropriate given inflationary pressures in the [US] economy," he wrote. Either way, the US needs to put its house in order before it burns down and markets melt down.

Anthony Rowley is a veteran journalist specialising in Asian economic and financial affairs



People take shelter from a downpour at the Wan Chai Promenade yesterday. Photo: Edmond So

LETTERS

Share your views with us and other Post readers in a Letter to the Editor. Include your full name and address, plus a phone number for verification. Please keep your letter to a maximum of 400 words. **Email** us at letters@scmp.com. **Address:** 19/F, Tower One, Times Square, 1 Matheson Street, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong.

Let's shape future of the city by drawing strength from its past

Stephen Roach is right to have cast doubt over Hong Kong. But he is also irrelevant to the city's future, against the rich tapestry of its history.

Hong Kong has faced many challenges through the years, from the Japanese occupation and mass immigration during the Chinese civil war to financial crises. Yet the city's economy has thrived, with gross domestic product growing significantly between the 1970s and now.

Hong Kong has been a unique melting pot, blending Eastern and Western influences. Its entertainment, sports, hospitality and food industries have all gained global recognition, with figures such as Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan becoming household names and sporting events like the Hong Kong Sevens gaining renown.

But more critically, this city has been transformed by people who chose to build, not belittle. Individuals of Chinese heritage who were well-versed in Western ways, like my great-uncle, Sir Boshan Wei Yuk, who introduced novel banking practices as a comprador; my grandfather, who helped build critical infrastructure like Kai Tak airport by co-founding Hsin Chong, the construction firm; and my father, who returned from abroad to build wealth management practices in Hong Kong and across Asia.

While Roach may be right that Hong Kong faces an uncertain future, it is the current Hongkongers who will shape the city's future – the people who stand shoulder to shoulder to do what is right for Hong Kong, on these shores and afar.

The future can be greater yet if Hongkongers choose to address the city's most urgent issues. We have the responsibility and agency to shape the city's future, regardless of the detractors throwing sticks and stones from outside the tent.

We need to be courageous enough to know our city's heritage, leverage it and chart an as-yet-undiscovered and unique path forward.

Tak Lo, Pak Shek Kok

Carefully vet talent scheme applicants

Late in 2022, Hong Kong introduced and enhanced measures to entice talent to the city. As of May, as many as 300,000 applications have been received for the government's various talent schemes, and 190,000 of them have been approved. Most of the incoming professionals are from the mainland.

While it is important to attract talent, it is also necessary to retain the genuinely qualified. Recently, there has been concerns over online guides that advise talent visa holders to extend their visas by becoming insurance agents or setting up shell companies. Thus, it is not unreasonable to have a flicker of doubt about whether all the talent visa holders are filling positions across professions and solving the city's manpower shortage.

As one official put it, if Hong Kong can attract 100,000 individuals on top of the 50,000 young people graduating from local universities every year, the city's economy will be much boosted.

But it also means that talent scheme applications must be carefully vetted, and future job vacancies properly forecast. The incoming professionals should be here to help our economy, without squeezing local talent out of jobs – even though some may say a little competition won't hurt our young graduates.

Randy Lee, Ma On Shan

China must stand tall with tit-for-tat tariffs

I refer to "What the EU's extra tariffs on China's electric vehicles mean for carmakers in both markets" (June 20).

Both the European Union and the United States are imposing tariffs on Chinese electric cars and driving a huge discussion about whether the Chinese government should fight back in the same way.

For me, as a Chinese, the answer is absolutely clear: yes. This is because whenever I look back on the history of my motherland, I always lament the Northern Song and Qing dynasties, when the state was soft in the face of foreign invasion and domination, dragging out an ignoble existence and as a result, intensifying the arrogance of foreigners who might believe Chinese people are a timid lot. The Chinese government should learn a lesson from the miserable history of the country, and assert Chinese dignity by imposing similar tariffs on foreign vehicles.

The electric car industry means a lot to the Chinese, and for the Chinese dream. We must not tolerant any kind of threat to our industrial development.

Fung Zhan Hong, Ho Man Tin

HK's 'Little Thailand' is well worth saving

I refer to the report, "Half of shops affected by renewal scheme in Hong Kong's 'Little Thailand' aim to stay in area" (June 16).

In the early 20th century, Chiu Chow people migrated to Thailand and married Thais. By the 1970s, many Thai-Chinese families had settled in Kowloon City, with a large Chiu Chow population in the infamous Kowloon Walled City.

While urban renewal schemes like the Kowloon City project seek to rejuvenate and make an area more attractive and liveable, heightening its appeal to residents and tourists, there is also a risk of unravelling the fabric of the community. The renewal scheme should ensure heritage is conserved and seamlessly integrated into the rejuvenated district.

Nicole Leung, Kwai Chung

BACK PAGE

Ban phones in schools

Robert Badal says amid growing concerns about the harm caused by screen addiction, billions spent on useless 'ed-tech' are draining badly needed education funds and profiting technology entrepreneurs instead of supporting teachers

Last year, the surgeon general in the United States warned of "growing evidence that social media use is associated with harm to young people's mental health".

In September last year, Unesco exposed the pandemic's "ed-tech tragedy", where an "unprecedented educational dependence on technology often resulted in unchecked exclusion, staggering inequality, inadvertent harm and the elevation of learning models that place machines and profit before people".

In March, Jonathan Haidt warned, in his book *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*, of a catastrophic shift in children's energy and attention to the virtual world from the physical one.

Earlier this month, the Canadian province of Alberta, following in the footsteps of Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia, announced classroom restrictions on mobile phone use, with Education Minister Demetrios Nicolaides saying: "The risks to students' mental well-being and academic success are real, and we must take steps now to combat these effects."

> Parents lament that they cannot stop their children's non-stop phone use. They cannot stop their own either

The evidence has been building for a long time and has become overwhelming – there are at least 54,006 studies on academia.edu about "social media addiction". It is no longer a question of the issue needing more study or the default cliché that we need to teach responsible internet use.

We are hooked on screens, mostly phones, that have been engineered to be addictive to use and to harvest our data to sell us things – and it is harming us mentally, physically and emotionally. The harm to children is even more so as they are in their developmental years.

Childhood, which used to be spent playing and imagining, is now centred on phones, a real-life horror story articulated in Haidt's *The Anxious Generation*. And the billions of dollars being spent on useless "ed-tech" are draining badly needed education funds and putting it in the pockets of tech entrepreneurs.

So-called education tech has never been shown to have any benefit over "traditional" education methods in producing results. Head-to-head comparisons suggest it is grotesquely overrated.

But even if tech entrepreneurs could manage to fund even one study that showed superior results, what possible justification could be made for adding screen time to children's lives when they are already spending too much of their day online?

People are surprised when I tell them there is scarcely proof that ed-tech works despite more than 455,000 education apps available for download. Dr Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, a Temple University professor who spoke recently on a Brookings Institute webinar called "Screens and children's well-being", has looked at 120 of the most popular education apps and found that only two "seemed to have some education value".



Education technology has never been shown to have any benefit over "traditional" methods in producing results. Photo: SCMP Pictures

The reasons behind this unbridled propagation of ed-tech are rooted in beliefs and money.

My Nanzan University colleagues in Japan were surprised when I added master of business administration (MBA) coursework to my master of arts degree and TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages) certification instead of getting a doctorate of philosophy. But in my MBA classes, I learned of a widely held belief – an enthusiasm for technology – that new technology is always helpful and good.

If you read Unesco's report, "An ed-tech tragedy?", you will learn about the parallel rhetoric of "technology solutionism": that technology will always solve the problem – even if it created it. The report details how the tech-heavy response during Covid-19 was built on criticism of education as "broken" and needing to be fixed. Marketing buzzwords such as "digital transformation" had been worming their way into discussions about education for years.

The pandemic kicked the door open. Another marketing buzzword followed: "leapfrog". We were going to leapfrog into a brave new world of better learning. Technology to the rescue. Lockdowns were a disaster for students but a boondoggle for ed-tech companies.

Educators are insecure about criticising ed-tech. Critics are labelled as "traditional", with a suggestion of the ultimate put-down: "old". Ed-tech advocates rhapsodised about the "future" and the cash poured in. A title of a recent email I received from The Edge, a newsletter from the Chronicle of Higher Education, says it all: "Is even unsexy ed tech worth US$800 million?"

In Hong Kong, the situation is critical. I recently carried out English reading tests on primary schoolchildren in Kwai Hing and every student was a minimum of three years behind and reading comprehension skills were non-existent. Many students cannot even begin the process of solving a problem.

In the words of one girl: "I hate 'hard'." I could write volumes about the Hong Kong children I have met who have been ruined by screens. Parents lament that they cannot stop their children's non-stop phone use. They cannot stop their own either, it seems.

This is why cutting ed-tech and banning phones make sense. Schools are controlled environments designed for learning. They offer a place for children to learn not only subjects, but also about cooperation and socialisation. And despite being overworked, underpaid and all too easily criticised and blamed for everything, teachers in Hong Kong are, by and large, dedicated professionals.

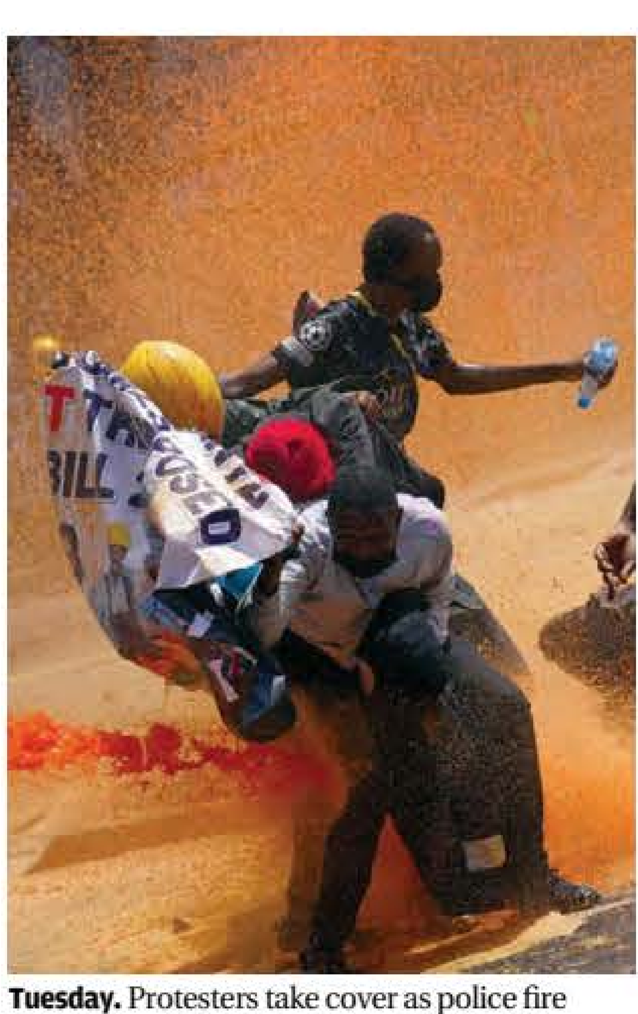
It might sound unsexy but let us give them the support and resources to teach, and stop making tech entrepreneurs rich at the expense of our children's lives.

Los Angeles native Robert Badal is an author, teacher and former corporate consultant and CEO speech-writer

PHOTOS OF THE WEEK



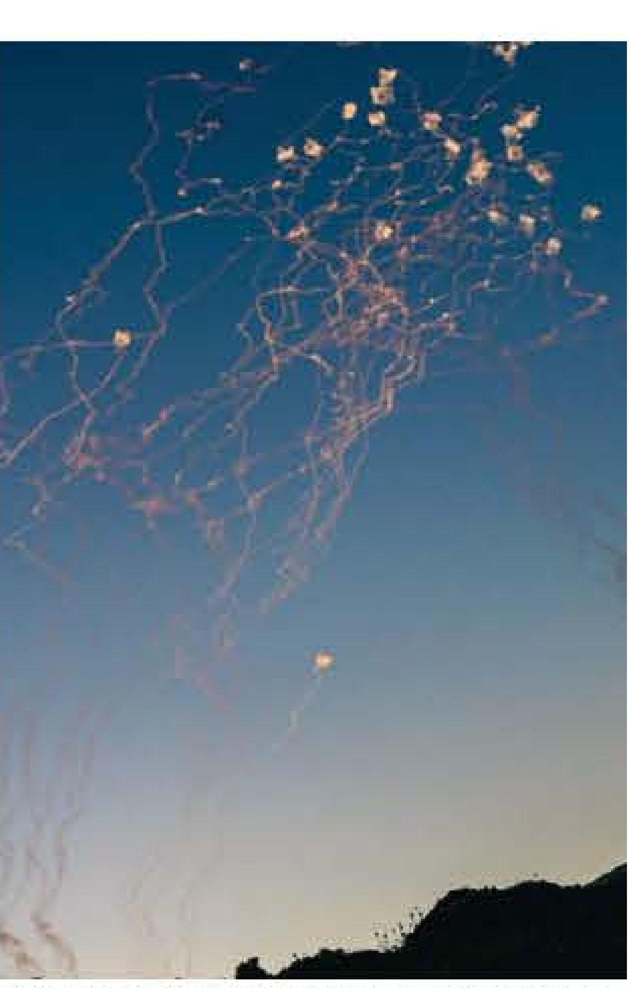
Monday. A bather cools off in a river in Karachi, Pakistan, amid the recent heatwave in which temperatures reached up to 50 degrees Celsius in some parts of the country. Photo: EPA



Tuesday. Protesters take cover as police fire water cannon during a demonstration in downtown Nairobi, Kenya, against proposed tax hikes in a controversial finance bill. Photo: AP



Wednesday. A displaced Palestinian woman feeds her son drink at a school in Khan Younis in the Gaza Strip, where they are sheltering amid the Israel-Gaza war. Photo: Reuters



Thursday. The sky over Safed in northern Israel is marked with smoke trails as the country's anti-missile system intercepts rockets fired from neighbouring Lebanon. Photo: Xinhua



Friday. Taiwanese conscripts demonstrate their combat skills during a visit by the self-ruled island's leader, William Lai Ching-te, to a military base in Taichung. Photo: AFP

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

I, by nature, like making friends. I don't like making enemies. But I have to defend myself if I'm punched in the face

CHIEF EXECUTIVE JOHN LEE KA-CHIU ON HOW HONG KONG WILL FIGHT "A SERIOUS DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN" LED BY THE WEST

Your outstanding contributions will be forever remembered

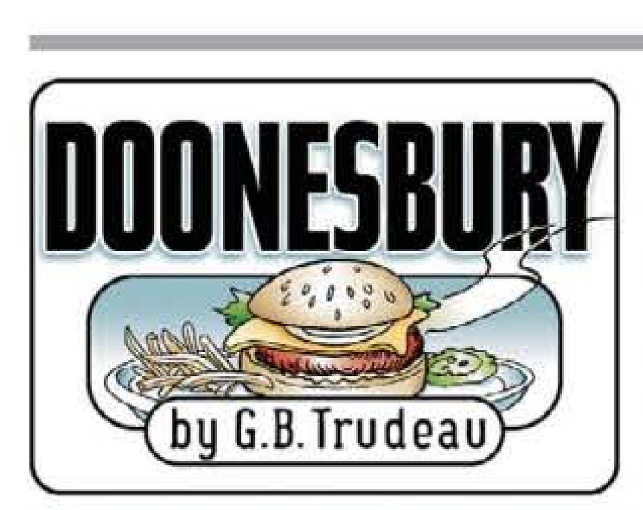
PRESIDENT XI JINPING, IN A WRITTEN ADDRESS, HAILS THE CHANG'E-6 LUNAR MISSION TEAM'S HISTORIC ACHIEVEMENT AFTER THE FIRST ROCK SAMPLES COLLECTED FROM THE MOON'S FAR SIDE LANDED ON EARTH

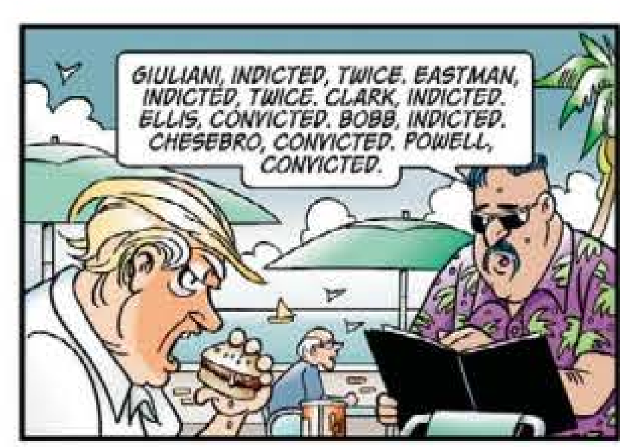
Everyone has times when they are not happy, so if you are not happy, do not come to work

YU DONGLAI, HEAD OF A SUPERMARKET CHAIN IN HENAN PROVINCE, WHO IS OFFERING STAFF 10 DAYS OF SO-CALLED UNHAPPY LEAVE IN ADDITION TO 30 DAYS OF ANNUAL HOLIDAYS AND A FIVE-DAY SPRING FESTIVAL BREAK

I will do my best. Shot by shot, not point by point

HONG KONG BADMINTON PLAYER LEE CHEUK-YIU, WHO IS COMPETING AT THE PARIS OLYMPICS NEXT MONTH







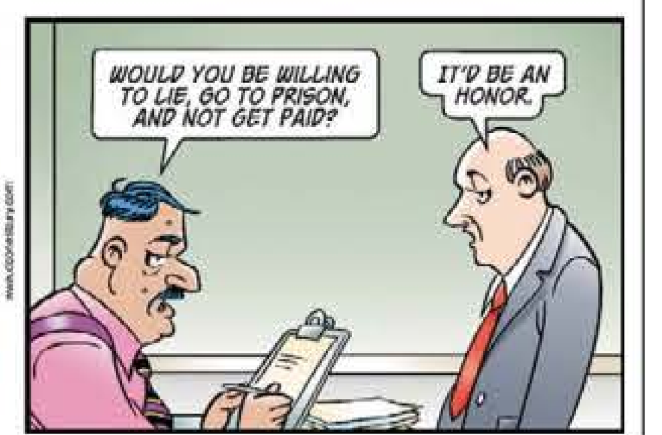












COMMENTARY - SHYAM SARAN

Urgent action must be taken to save 'water tower' of the world

Heatwaves across Asia are underscoring the immediate and severe impact of climate change. My country India is grappling with record-breaking temperatures, with some parts of northern India exceeding 50 degrees Celsius. China is also bracing for an unusually hot summer, which follows 2022's worst heatwave on record with abnormally high temperatures lasting more than 70 days.

This extreme weather coincides with alarming findings from the annual Snow Update Report by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). The report shows snow levels are almost a fifth below normal in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region this year, with experts advising water officials to initiate drought management and pre-emptive emergency water supply strategies.

The disastrous impact of climate change is seen first on mountains, and this puts downstream countries on the frontline of the crisis, particularly the eight that make up the Hindu Kush Himalaya – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan.

The Hindu Kush Himalaya, known as the world's "water tower", is a single ecological unit, divided by political boundaries but unified by natural assets such as mountains, rivers and biodiversity. Importantly, it is the source of 10 large Asian river systems – the Amu Darya, Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra, Irrawaddy, Salween, Mekong, Yangtze, Yellow River and Tarim – serving 2 billion people.

Protecting these assets, such as by slowing glacier melt, is therefore critically important – but impossible without regional collaboration.

Another recent ICIMOD study confirms the region is undergoing unprecedented, and what is likely to be irreversible, change. Glaciers are melting at an alarming rate.

Regional collaboration is imperative in dealing with this crisis. Natural disasters caused by climate change are increasing in frequency and intensity, and disproportionately affect populations suffering from poverty and deprivation. National boundaries cannot protect the countries of the Hindu Kush Himalaya from these, irrespective of where events may have originated.

Countries in South Asia previously made efforts to present a common position on climate change, at the Cop16 UN climate conference in 2010. Countries from the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation had adopted an action plan for climate change, which listed several measures to deal with the challenge. Despite this initial promise, many agreed measures remain unimplemented.

Nevertheless, initiatives such as adaptation research centres and regional technology innovation networks show a willingness to address shared challenges. Revitalising this collaborative spirit is more crucial than ever.

Net zero, the carbon ambition consuming the world's attention, is at best a naive hope. Net zero by 2050 does not mean zero emissions by that date. It means that in 2050 whatever emissions are being generated are matched by expanded natural carbon sinks, such as forests and oceans, and technological solutions. Net zero therefore is a balance sheet concept that hides the uncertainties of climate action.

Some countries in the region are doing all they can to reduce the impact of climate change. For example, Bhutan is the world's first "carbon negative" country, and conserving its rich forest lands is a feat for which it should be lauded.

Leaders and citizens must recognise that the fallout from the ecological crisis will far eclipse many of the divisive issues which demand our attention, while regional collaboration can yield significant environmental and economic benefits.

The region's ecological challenges necessitate an urgent call for regional collaboration. By working together, sharing knowledge and empowering institutions such as ICIMOD, countries can tackle climate change, protect shared natural assets and ensure a sustainable future for all. Embracing a unified approach to these transboundary issues is essential for the region's survival and prosperity.

Shyam Saran served as India's foreign secretary from 2004 to 2006 and the prime minister's special envoy for and chief negotiator on climate change from 2007 to 2010. He chaired India's National Security Advisory Board under the National Security Council between 2013 and 2015


South China Morning Post
Post Magazine
30.06.24
MR WU IN AMERICA
The Qing dynasty diplomat who became a darling of the Western press
HOW A LITERARY ENTREPRENEUR SEALED PENGUIN'S SUCCESS IN CHINA
NAVIGATING CHINESE FAMILY MEALS IN A MIXED-RACE RELATIONSHIP
Scobie



金紫荊女企業家協會

GOLDEN BAUHINIA WOMEN ENTREPRENEUR ASSOCIATION

第五屆金紫荊女企業家獎

THE 5TH GOLDEN BAUHINIA WOMEN ENTREPRENEUR AWARDS

截止提名及報名日期

NOMINATION AND APPLICATION DEADLINE

3AUG2024

2024年8月3日

報名連結
APPLICATION FORM

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FEATURES

Wu Tingfang, former Chinese minister to the United States, in 1922. Picture: Getty Images

COVER ILLUSTRATION: a depiction of Wu in his natural habitat, at the podium giving a speech, framed by US and Imperial Qing flags. Picture: Samuel Porteous

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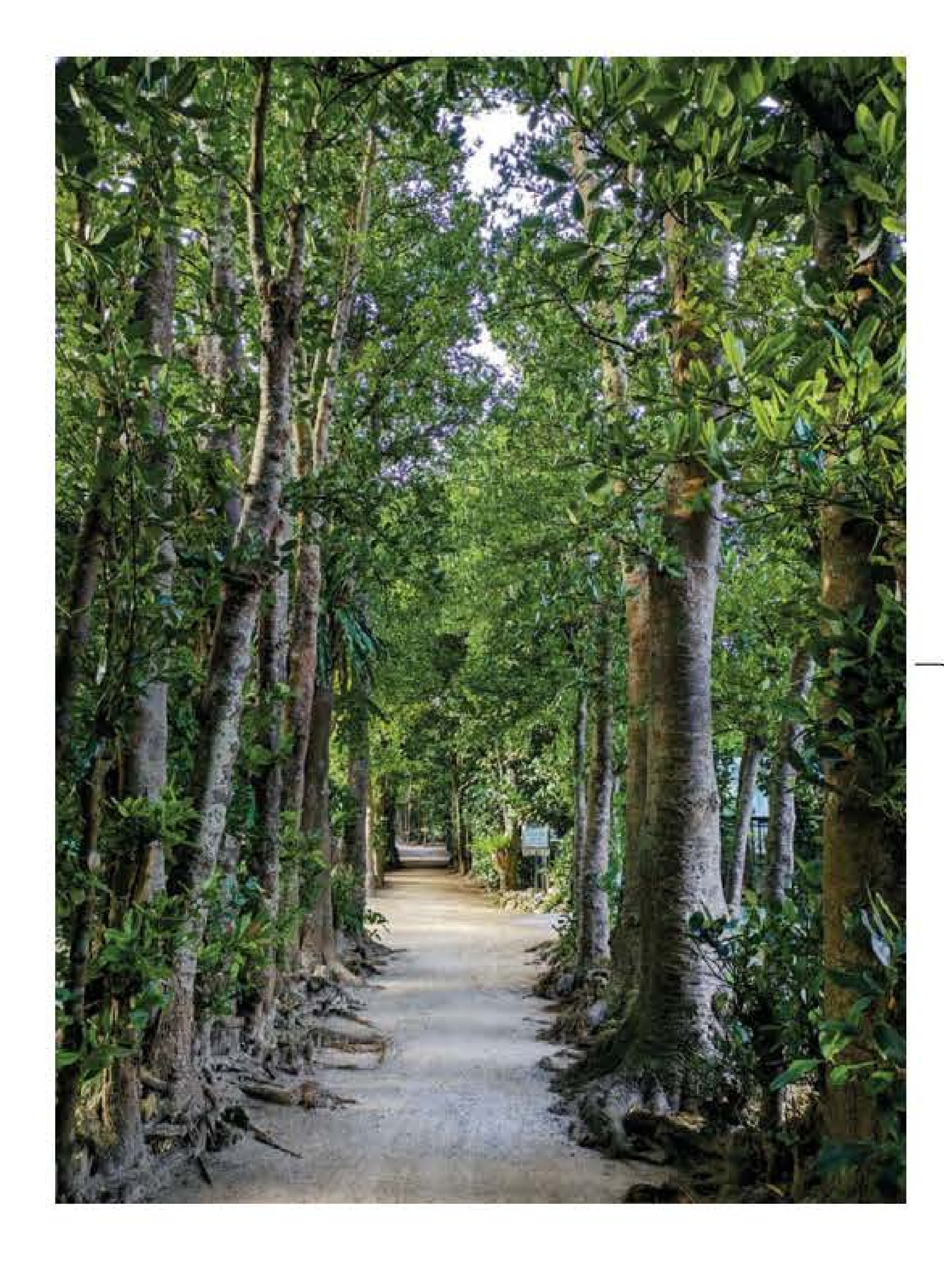
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30.06
Post Magazine

There will be no Post Magazine next week. We will return on July 14.

"We waited until it was dark enough for nobody to see us, and then just went for it. We were in the water for quite some time – at least four or five hours."
— Chan Yung-tak





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HOME FROM HOME | CLIFF BUDDLE

Parade rain

Memories of Hong Kong inevitably fade after moving away. But my recollection of that historic day 27 years ago, when the city returned to China, remains vivid.

The last day of British rule was marked by an intoxicating mix of excitement, optimism, some sadness and much uncertainty. We had no idea what was going to happen. The answer, it turned out, was not a lot, at least in the early days.

Much has changed since. But Hong Kong's often wet summer weather has not. The day the sun went down on this part of the British Empire, on June 30, 1997, everyone got drenched. The speech of Prince Charles, as he was then, was barely audible amid the sound of rain pummeling umbrellas.

I was sent to cover British prime minister Tony Blair's meeting with Chinese president Jiang Zemin in Hung Hom. I stood in the pouring rain, watching the lowering of the British flag at midnight – on television, through the window of a bar. It was not how I had imagined myself marking the long-awaited moment. After arriving back home in Mui Wo in the early hours, I watched on TV as the main PLA contingent rolled across the border. It was greeted by flag-waving patriots. But the sight was unfamiliar and a little scary. Thankfully, they disappeared into their barracks and have barely emerged since.



Hong Kong residents greet PLA soldiers on Jockey Club Road in Sheung Shui on July 1, 1997. Photo: Oliver Tsang

Many residents, especially those from overseas, fled what they thought would be a sinking ship. A lawyer friend told me: "Don't hang on." Well, I hung on for another 25 years. And I am glad I did.

Hong Kong gave me opportunities, enabling me to study law while reporting and editing for the South China Morning Post. Locals made me feel welcome. I have many memories to treasure. It was, therefore, difficult to leave in 2022. Like other former residents now living overseas, there was a period of grieving for my former life in the city. We also grieve for the Hong Kong that existed before the protests, pandemic and political transformation.

Life in England is better than I expected. I am very much enjoying living in the countryside. It makes a refreshing change after 28 years in a crowded city. But when I look through my pictures of the harbour at sunset, the waterfall in Mui Wo or Mid-Autumn Festival lanterns, my mind drifts 6,000 miles away.

I have a new home. But it is still a home from home. I wish Hong Kong well as it remembers the handover and reflects on all that has happened since.





Left: Vicky Lau, chef and owner of Tate Dining Room; **Above:** Lau's roasted duck with five-spice hibiscus strawberry and plum compote will be paired with Wu Yuan Jian Rou Gui tea. Pictures: Tate Dining Room

ON OUR RADAR | JOANNE YAU

Matched to a tea

Pairing tea with food is a delicate balancing act that when executed by experts can make a dining experience extra special.

Expect that when chef Vicky Lau, owner of the two-Michelin-starred Tate Dining Room in Sheung Wan, hosts "Ode to Tea", a tea-pairing lunch experience and Puer tea workshop in partnership with Hong Kong-based tea experts Being & Tea.

The four-course lunch will be served Fridays and Saturdays until July 27 at Tate Dining Room, where guests will be treated to French-Chinese cuisine juxtaposed with rare teas, emblematic of Lau's East-West culinary vision.

Lau and Being & Tea founder Wing Yeung have carefully matched each drink's profile – colour, aroma, taste and form – to the composition of each dish.

And while tea-pairing menus are not new at Tate Dining Room, a stand-out feature of this experience is that Yeung will be brewing the teas on-site.

The inspiration behind the menu stems from Lau's fascination with the core philosophy of a Chinese tea ceremony, she says.

"The fundamental idea is to use tea as a means to bring people closer to nature and cultivate a sense of balance and harmony," she says. "I wanted to capture that essence of connecting diners with the natural world through a thoughtful tea pairing."

Lau's dish of turnip blancmange with sweet shrimp and seaweed sauce, for example, is paired with Being & Tea's Yunnan green tea. The tea's umami and oceanic flavours, with notes of kombu, seaweed, herbs, bamboo, jasmine and marshmallow, is the perfect way to enhance the dish's savoury elements, Lau says.

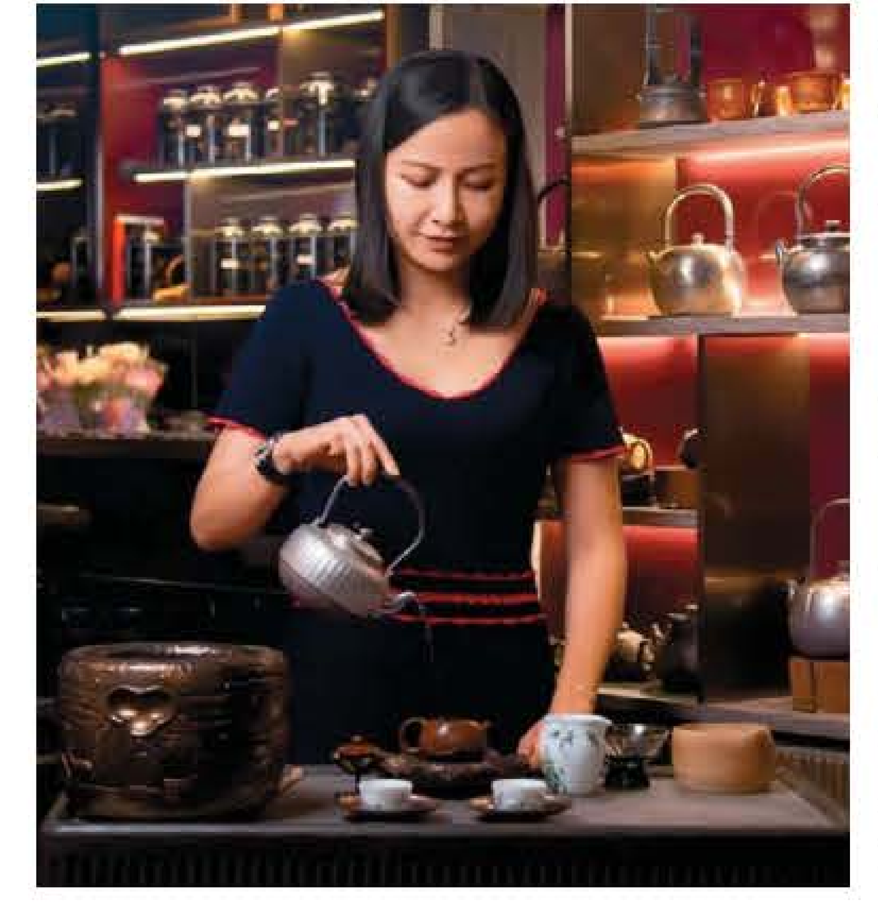
Meanwhile, Lau's roasted duck with five-spice hibiscus strawberry and plum compote will be paired with Wu Yuan Jian Rou Gui tea, a mellow, smooth and refined blend with a strong woody aroma, complementing the duck's richness and the sweetness of the compote.

According to Lau, each pairing can "balance the flavours, add colour, reduce greasiness and enhance the fragrance of every dish".

Much like wine and other traditional Chinese tea pairings, Lau says her fusion interpretation aims to celebrate "the natural balance and intrinsic connection between food, tea and the environment".

Tea drinkers seeking a deeper understanding of premium aged Puer tea can attend the Tate x Being & Tea workshop on July 26.

"Puer is also known for its health benefits and the way the tea can evolve in flavour through continued fermentation and ageing," Lau says. "Understanding these processes and how they impact the tea's taste is a fascinating topic to explore in-depth."



Being & Tea founder Wing Yeung. Picture: Being & Tea

A highlight of the workshop will be the tasting of a rare, old Puer valued at HK$480,000 per brick, reflective of the time and expertise required to create it.

The lunch menu with the tea-pairing add-on costs HK$1,580 per guest (HK$1,180 without), while the Puer workshop is HK$2,880 per person and is limited to eight participants.

For details visit tate.com.hk.

Well aisle be

Supermarkets began to appear in maritime Asia just before World War I, and in 1960s Hong Kong became sites of anti-colonial protests.

All over the world, a wander through local supermarket aisles offers fascinatingly unexpected insights into everyday consumer tastes. From locally produced seasonal foodstuffs to imported items sourced from across the globe, supermarkets allow glimpses into the broader cultures and societies they serve.

But like other universal aspects of life now taken for granted, well-stocked supermarkets – in Hong Kong and elsewhere – are relatively recent innovations.

These days, local supermarkets are among the single greatest social levellers found in any community. From society's wealthiest members to the less affluent, virtually everyone now sources at least some of their daily needs from these establishments. But until recent decades, this was not the case.

The earliest prototype supermarkets began to appear in maritime Asia's port cities just before World War I, and then burgeoned in the hectic decade of runaway global prosperity and technical innovation that characterised the Roaring Twenties.

As was usual during that period, American entrepreneurialism led the way. Across the region, long-established trading companies with pre-existing import-export divisions swiftly moved into expanded retail distribution of consumer goods.



The Old Dairy Farm Depot circa 1905-10, now the site of Central's Fringe Club.

In the interwar years, Asia's market leader was British firm Whiteaway Laidlaw, which had retail emporiums in every major port city from Calcutta to Shanghai, including Singapore and Hong Kong. Amusingly punned as "Right Away and Paid For", the firm astutely combined innovative elements of "cash and carry" grocery shopping, which was then rapidly coming into fashion in places such as Britain and Australia, with the cashless convenience of old-style Hong Kong comprador shop purchases.

In Hong Kong's traditional comprador shops, which stocked everything from boxes of matches and tins of butter to imported meat and fresh fruit, individual accounts were kept in the shop's ledger, purchases were signed for and a bill sent at the end of the month, which was then settled by personal cheque. Some purchases may have been carried away on the spot, but most items were home-delivered. Perhaps to the surprise of some today, comprador shop purchasing practicalities were not materially different to modern-day credit card shopping. Seasonal vouchers and early forms of "loyalty point programmes" were also on offer for regular patrons.

In pre-war Hong Kong, a prototype supermarket existed with Dairy Farm's grocery shops. Only three branches existed: in Central, on The Peak and in Kowloon Tong, and the small number accurately reflected the colony's then-minuscule resident middle class. Each Dairy Farm branch stocked imported grocery items that European, Eurasian, local Portuguese or overseas Chinese customers from Western countries would habitually buy, such as bottled sauces and condiments, canned goods, refrigerated imported meat and cheese, and locally produced fresh milk. Unsurprisingly, these branches were located in residential catchment areas with significant target markets.

Along with the convenient purchase of everyday consumer goods, an element of real or imagined social class crept into these places.

Local proto-supermarkets were places where English was typically spoken – the shop assistants were often foreigners – and a general standard of dress, deportment and presumed savoir faire were expected from those who entered the premises.

Actual or perceived racism or general social snobbishness on the part of management, employees and other customers inevitably provoked a furiously indignant reaction from some who felt themselves – rightly or wrongly – to be unfairly discriminated against or excluded.

In the late 1960s, these establishments periodically became the focal point for small-scale anti-colonial protests by student groups and other social activists. These were – in the Hong Kong way – rowdy but otherwise non-violent. Once their general point had been made, protesters soon dispersed.

With rising local affluence from the 1970s, along with changing consumer tastes, air-conditioned supermarkets became more widespread across Hong Kong and new branches opened up in districts where only small-scale grocery shops and wet markets had hitherto existed.

Shoppers at Wah Fu Estate's Wellcome supermarket on its opening day in 1970. Picture: SCMP



Deadly raid

"Armed robbers shot and fatally wounded two Pakistani security guards in Tsimshatsui yesterday [...] after a daring raid on the King Fook Gold and Jewellery Co on Nathan Road," reported the South China Morning Post on June 28, 1983. "Two men who were masked and armed with a .38 calibre gun and a wooden plank stormed the shop [...] A third man, armed with a gun, rushed forward to try and seize the shotgun of the Miramar Hotel security guard who was in the corridor next to the shop.

"Once inside the shop, the pair shouted 'robbery' to the 10 staff members and the one brandishing the pistol fired a warning shot. They then leapt over the counter, snatched 10 trays of gold ornaments valued at $2.47 million and stuffed them into a bag they were carrying.

"While the robbery was going on, the gunman who had rushed to the hotel's security guard, Mr Manreze Khan (36), put up a struggle with him. At this juncture, King Fook's security man, Mr Zabit Khan (48), who was armed with a club, joined in the melee and armlocked the robber [...] The man inside the getaway car jumped out of the vehicle and [...] fired three shots from his .45 calibre gun. Two shots hit the neck and the chest of Mr Zabit Khan, while Mr Manreze Khan was wounded in the head."



Police investigate on Nathan Road after the robbery, on June 27, 1983. Picture: SCMP

On June 16, 1984, the Post reported that "two men were yesterday sentenced in the High Court [...] Cheung Sai-hung (25), a hawker, was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment on two counts of manslaughter and one of robbery [...] Yeung King-yu (27), also a hawker, was sentenced to 22 years imprisonment on the robbery charge."

Upon later appeal, the pair's sentences were set aside, on the grounds that the jury's verdict was inconsistent.



Chan Yung-tak

The mainland refugee who fled to Hong Kong on his third attempt tells Jason Wordie about getting caught, prison time and his barrister son, who now helps other asylum seekers.

Chan Yung-tak in Ma On Shan. Picture: Edmond So

ONE OF FIVE I was born in Macau in 1943 but don't have any documentary proof of that; Chinese midwives didn't keep such records in those days, and anyway, I was born during wartime, and everything was pretty disordered. Later on, I learned that our family lived above the "Jik Lei" bicycle shop on Rua do Cinco de Outubro, down on the Inner Harbour – it's not very far from the Hong Kong Temple. We were five children in our family, but only four of us lived to be adults. Unfortunately, my oldest brother died as an infant in Macau during the war. Another older brother eventually moved to New York and settled there; he has now passed away. My next oldest brother and his family never came to live in Hong Kong – they stayed on in Canton (Guangzhou) and now they live in Sydney, Australia. My sister was the first of our family to settle down in Hong Kong. She arrived by herself in 1959, and eventually had a family. They still live here, and we meet from time to time; she has also passed away, so I am the only sibling still living here now.

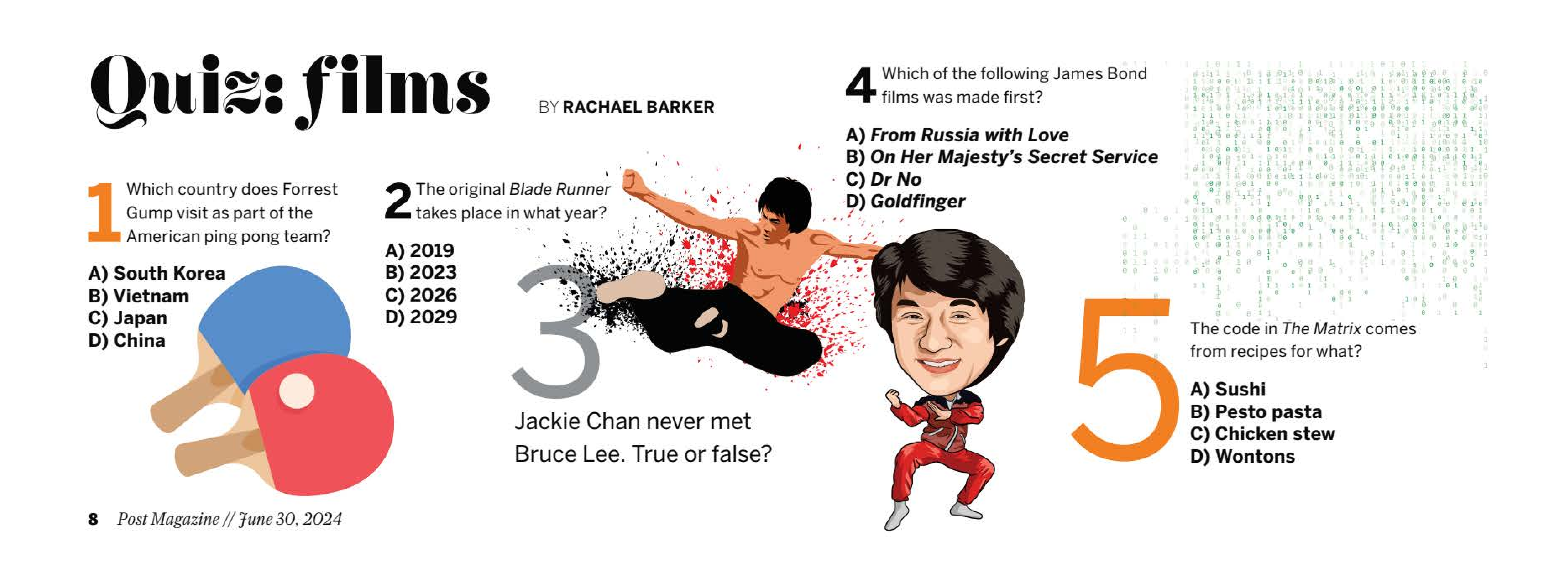
NEW CHINA We were a Shanghai family originally, but moved down to Canton after the Japanese invaded China. The family worked at a tobacco factory. They moved to Macau when the business moved a branch operation there. Then sometime after the war ended, we settled back in Canton, at Sai Kwan (Xiguan). We were living there when the Nationalist government left China for Taiwan, and the Communists took over. My primary and secondary school years were spent in Canton. Life was hard at that time. The authorities put signs around the necks of people considered public enemies of one kind or another, with various abusive slogans written in Chinese characters; they were then driven around the streets for the public to curse at them. So-called rich landlords and others who were considered "social undesirables" in the new order were pulled in for questioning whenever there was another political campaign under way. That happened to us periodically. My father was considered *bat faat zi boon gaa*, an "unlawful bourgeois", and also a *hak chat leui*, "black seven category", and so he was repeatedly harassed during the "Three-anti" and "Five-anti" campaigns. These social movements were undertaken in the early 1950s, political purges that started almost as soon as the Communists took power. It was just one thing after another – that was what I remember distinctly from my young years in the New China.

NEVER ENOUGH Shortages of everything we take for granted these days were commonplace. In particular, soap and toothpaste were in short supply. Staple foodstuffs such as rice and cooking oil, along with cloth and so on, were all state-issued on what were known as *leung piu* (ration cards) by this time, and there was

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Quiz: films

BY **RACHAEL BARKER**



1 Which country does Forrest Gump visit as part of the American ping pong team?

A) South Korea
B) Vietnam
C) Japan
D) China

2 The original *Blade Runner* takes place in what year?

A) 2019
B) 2023
C) 2026
D) 2029

3 Jackie Chan never met Bruce Lee. True or false?

4 Which of the following James Bond films was made first?

A) *From Russia with Love*
B) *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*
C) *Dr No*
D) *Goldfinger*

5 The code in *The Matrix* comes from recipes for what?

A) Sushi
B) Pesto pasta
C) Chicken stew
D) Wontons

simply never enough of anything. I went to Shanghai in 1965 and ended up staying there for about year or so. I can still speak Shanghainese – whether I have an accent or not, well, that's for other people to tell. My son grew up speaking Cantonese here in Hong Kong, but he also knows a few Shanghainese words – mainly foods, general expressions, that kind of thing.

FIRST ATTEMPT My reasons for eventually leaving the mainland were straightforward: I simply couldn't get any work and therefore did not see any viable future for myself if I stayed there. The first time I tried to swim out I was 25 years old, and that attempt was made on the west side of the Pearl River Delta. I first tried to swim across to somewhere near Taipa, in Macau, but that attempt wasn't successful. Unfortunately, as I was heading back to Canton, I got caught. I got arrested in Tan Chau (Tanzhou) and was later sent back to Canton. The others didn't get caught, but I was unlucky. I was released after a period of detention in Canton, and then sent to a commune.

TAKE TWO Naturally enough, after a short time I got fed up with that existence and made another attempt to get out. My girlfriend came on the second attempt, with one set of friends on their own bikes, and me and my girlfriend on another one. Twenty-two people made the attempt. We got turned back at Lung Kong (Longgang), further up the East River, without even getting to the water, and had to return to Cheung Muk Tau (Zhangmutou). The penalty for trying to get out was worse if you got caught again. I was kept in jail for 54 days at the Dongguan Detention Centre. I was accused of being the *ah tau* (ringleader) – which was true – which was why I was in jail longer.

PRISON LIFE At the detention centre, sometimes eight or 10 people were kept on the same wooden board to sleep – there was no bed or anything like that. We even had to s*** there, too – it was an absolutely shocking experience. Other, more fortunate people had some supplementary food brought to them – but my family were in Canton, so there was nobody to bring me anything. The other people there didn't take any pity on me, either. For one meal, we had only three *leung* (about 150g) of rice to eat; this made it clear to me that there was not enough to eat outside, either. Those were the times. We also got some kind of vegetable, no idea what it was; green and mushy is all I remember now. There simply wasn't anything else to eat, save for dried biscuits of various kinds, which just made it all harder.

THIRD TIME'S A CHARM As a result of that horrible experience, I was even more determined to flee the mainland. On this last attempt, my future wife – my son's mother – came along. We went down from Canton to Dongguan, which was far more convenient as a drop-off point to eventually get to Hong Kong. Then I stole a bicycle and we rode some 70 miles to get to the jump-off point at the water's edge. Fuk Tin (Futian) was where we jumped off. On the mainland side there was no wire netting or fences or anything like that. On the Hong Kong side the frontier was completely wired off. Around Lau Fau Shan there were a lot of oyster shells – that was dangerous as we could get cut on them. Further on there was a lot of mud and mangroves. So Tsim Bei Tsui was what we aimed for. It was easy to aim for in the water, as it was completely black all around – there were no buildings or anything else there. Five lamp posts in front of the police post on the water's edge was what we headed towards.

WARM WELCOME On September 22, 1970, we swam into Hong Kong from China. As I recall now, we went into the water at around 7.30pm. We waited until it was dark enough for nobody to see us, and then just went for it. We were in the water for quite some time – at least four or five hours, judging from the time we arrived at the police post in Hong Kong. The European officer in charge was very friendly – I've never forgotten him. He gave me five Rothman cigarettes to smoke – that warmed me up after the swim. My son's partner later tracked down who this officer was, but unfortunately he has now passed away. Some people swam in with footballs or inflated bicycle inner tubes or other flotation aids, but we didn't have anything like that. Fortunately, I was a good swimmer – I'd been in the swimming team at high school, and was still young and fit, so that helped. After landing, we spent two nights at Yuen Long Police Station – it must have been for some kind of questioning, but I can't remember now.

FAMILY REUNION When we came across into Hong Kong, we arrived with absolutely nothing. We had to get new clothes, and after jail I had quite long hair, so almost the first thing I had to do was get a haircut – that needed to be done so a photograph could be taken for a new identity document. My girlfriend's parents were already in Hong Kong – they were living on Fuk Wa Street, in Sham Shui Po. The police sent us down to Kowloon. My older sister was living nearby, in Mong Kok, on Soy Street; other relatives were in Diamond Hill, and my godmother from Macau lived in Wan Chai. My older sister was quite a party girl, loved dancing, and later was a single mother; her kids are now in their 60s, with grown-up families of their own.

WHAT GOES AROUND I worked at various jobs – anything to make a living. My first job was working in a plastic bag factory in Lai Chi Kok. After that, I worked at my future father-in-law's garment business for a while, then in a fabric-dyeing factory, and as a lifeguard at the government swimming pool at Lei Cheng Uk. I worked as a lifeguard for about six years, until 1980, and later started up as a freelance taxi driver. Now I'm completely retired.

PROUD DAD Our son was born in 1973 – he is our only child. He stayed with relatives in Hong Kong for a year, then we took him back up to Canton, where he lived for the next couple of years with my parents. We visited him when we could, then brought him back to Hong Kong for kindergarten, and then primary and secondary school. We lived in various places – mostly in Diamond Hill – then moved to Ma On Shan in the late 1980s, where I still live. Eventually my son's mother and I divorced, but we are still friends. My son is a barrister now, and part of his work is to help refugees and asylum seekers who escaped to Hong Kong from other places in the world to deal with their own cases. I'm very proud of my son.

LOOKING BACK I didn't go back to Tsim Bei Tsui until late 2023, with my son and his partner. It's totally different today, but the police post looked much the same. We looked across to the other side; where the Shenzhen Bay Hotel is now was the spot where we made our way into the water, and this new life, so long ago. ■



6 In *Breakfast At Tiffany's*, what is the name of Holly Golightly's cat?

A) Kitty **C) Claws**
B) Cat **D) Paws**

7 What was the only film in which Leslie Cheung Kwok-wing played a policeman?

8 How old was Stockard Channing when she played 17-year-old high school student Betty Rizzo in *Grease*?

A) 21 **C) 33**
B) 28 **D) 37**

9 Which of the following was not a golden ticket winner in *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*?

A) Mike Television
B) Veruca Salt
C) Augustus Gloop
D) Charlie Bucket

10 Snow White did not cohabitate with which of the following?

A) Happy
B) Clappy
C) Dopey
D) Doc

ANSWERS ON PAGE 42

A diplomat extraordinaire

In his five years in Washington, starting in 1897, the charismatic and highly sociable Chinese minister to the United States, Wu Tingfang, helped steer US policy on the Middle Kingdom, becoming an unlikely darling of the American press in the process.

WORDS AND ARTWORK BY **SAMUEL PORTEOUS**



hen Wu Tingfang, the first English-speaking Chinese minister to the United States (serving 1897-1902), arrived in Washington, the stakes could not have been higher.

China's existence as a state was in play, and Wu's diplomacy and careful cultivation of a bilateral relationship with the US would play a key role in ensuring his country's survival. A key element of Wu's background that enabled him to play such a pivotal role in US-China relations was the unconventional diplomat's combination of bicultural education and experience.

Wu Tingfang was actually an official name, bestowed by the Chinese imperial government on Ng Choy, born in 1842 to a forward-thinking merchant in the Malacca Strait. As a boy, Ng received a blended education of "native" schooling on the mainland until he was 13, followed by the Christian middle school of St Paul's in Hong Kong. Upon graduation, he dabbled in journalism for a few years then spent more than a decade as a translator in Hong Kong's colonial police courts, wading through the muck of East-West relations. The ambitious Ng followed this with a high-honours law degree at London's prestigious Lincoln's Inn.

Upon his return to Hong Kong in 1877, enjoying minor celebrity status as the first Chinese to become an English barrister, Ng's upwards path continued. The 35-year-old set up a law practice in Hong Kong and fell increasingly under the patronage of "pro-native" Hong Kong governor John Pope Hennessy. In 1880, Hennessy appointed Ng to a non-elected position on the Hong Kong legislative council, and not long after, named him the colony's first Chinese police magistrate.

Ng's performance in these duties did not meet with universal acclaim, however. Less progressive elements took to the Overland China Mail to bemoan the "mediocre ability" and "superlative bumptiousness" of their latest legislator. Ng, who famously called upon his fellow Chinese to display more cheek in the British colony, could rub some the wrong way, and assessing his career options in 1882, he leapt at an opportunity to work for the Chinese imperial government in Tientsin.

The offer came from legendary foreign-relations mandarin and reformer Li Hongzhang, who was on the lookout for talented young Chinese adept in foreign languages and cultures. He needed this new kind of China bureaucrat to serve as a counterpoint to the standard high-level civil servants who surrounded him. These cloistered bureaucrats, with their deep study of the Chinese classics required by the 1,000-year-old government entrance exams, were ill-prepared to deal with a modern world dominated by Western powers.

As part of his entry into the loftier heights of the Chinese bureaucracy, Ng was bestowed his official name. Wu was the Mandarin translation of Ng, and "Tingfang" roughly translated to "hall fragrance", all intended to convey, according to a report in the Washington Evening Star, one who "is so just and eminent a law giver that the sweet savour of his reputation 'fills the court'".

The new Wu proved a quick student. In his first five years he played a key supporting role in negotiating settlement of the disastrous first Sino-Japanese war (1894-95), served as a director of the newly created Tientsin University, and managed China's first commercial railway. Having thus earned Li's trust, Wu became the first foreign-educated Chinese to be placed in a major diplomatic position.

Arriving in the spring of 1897, the new Chinese minister to Washington hit the ground running. According to the Atlanta Constitution, Wu "astonished" those present with his mastery of English while presenting his credentials to President William McKinley. Moreover, Wu's open and social nature was in high contrast with his predecessors. Within a few months the Chicago Tribune noted the always traditionally attired Wu was "fast becoming the best known and most popular diplomat in Washington". Almost all key cabinet ministers came to dinners hosted by Wu and his wife, and stories of Wu's capacity – when challenged – to drink assorted legislators under the table and then, as the Baltimore Sun described it, go "in search of new senators to conquer" became legendary.

Apart from contributing to the diplomatic social whirl in Washington, Wu also delivered in geopolitics. In 1898, at the onset of the Spanish-American War – America's first "Pacific pivot" – Wu assured the McKinley administration that the Chinese would maintain neutrality. This ensured Chinese ports remained open to the US Navy should they be needed during the conflict, by which an expansionist US acquired Guam and the Philippines. Through these acts and others, Wu soon established strong personal and professional ties with the US secretary of state, John Hay, as well as McKinley.

STORIES OF WU'S CAPACITY – WHEN CHALLENGED – TO DRINK ASSORTED LEGISLATORS UNDER THE TABLE AND THEN, AS THE BALTIMORE SUN DESCRIBED IT, GO "IN SEARCH OF NEW SENATORS TO CONQUER" BECAME LEGENDARY.



Wu Tingfang in Washington, circa 1900. Picture: Getty Images



Right: Wu and three other Chinese men read in the Chinese legation in Stewart Castle, Dupont Circle, Washington. Picture: Getty Images **Below:** a depiction of Wu attending his first American football game in 1901, at the University of Michigan. The diplomat found the sport surprisingly violent. **Far right:** a depiction of Wu cycling past the Chinese legation.

Beyond Washington, as his first years in the US unfolded, newspapers and the general public also became enamoured of Wu. The Chinese minister maintained a dizzying schedule of postprandial talks at high-level private clubs and august educational institutions. This was how one got one's message out in this era, and no one was better at it than Wu. As the Chicago Tribune noted, Wu, in his first years in Washington, pretty much "accepted invitations from just about anybody to go anywhere" and in so doing, endeared himself to everyone.

Wu was always up to something newsworthy. His insightful and entertaining pronouncements, be they on Confucianism and Christianity, women's hats, automobiles, or the revival of Chinese inventiveness, made their way into newspapers around the country – Wu was nothing if not good copy.

But it was not all fun and games. His speeches addressed the unfairness of the China Exclusion Act and the ill-regard that sometimes became violence that Chinese people often met in the US. He dealt with highbinder Chinese gangs afflicting Chinese communities, and even irrational attempts by San Francisco public-health authorities to impose race-based vaccination and quarantine measures to address an outbreak of bubonic plague that did not exist.

Wu himself was not immune to hostility. During a trip to New York early in his tenure, he and his entourage were attacked – their carriage surrounded by a mob and pelted with stones and eggs. The diplomat took these occasional public assaults, and even death threats, as part of the price of being a prominent public figure. Wu, as well as anyone, understood the power that derived from fame and popularity in America and how to wield it. And this proved fortunate. Nearing his third year in the US, events were conspiring to ensure he would need all the goodwill his public diplomacy had generated.

Up to that point Wu had helped shape a US

AS THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE NOTED, WU, IN HIS FIRST YEARS IN WASHINGTON, PRETTY MUCH "ACCEPTED INVITATIONS FROM JUST ABOUT ANYBODY TO GO ANYWHERE" AND IN SO DOING, ENDEARED HIMSELF TO EVERYONE.





policy towards China reflective of what the Atlanta Constitution described as the young country's instinctual preference for "its capitalists to invade foreign countries, not its army".

Hay, who had been raised in an anti-slavery family and served as an aide to Abraham Lincoln, had already come out in late 1899 with a clear statement from the McKinley administration that despite entreaties from several European nations setting up cantonments and trading ports in China, the US "has no intention of acquiring a sphere of influence in China".

The American position was not solely motivated by its better angels. Its Open-Door policy assisting China maintain its territorial integrity also reflected US thinking that a China open for trade – as opposed to a China parcelled out among rival blocks – would be the best possible outcome for America's fast-emerging exporters and businessmen.

Then came the Boxers. Initially dismissed as a ragtag group of anti-Western peasants, superstitious idlers and disaffected members of the Chinese army, the movement soon built momentum. A divided Chinese government waffled between condemnation and calling them patriots. By June 1900, "the Society of Righteous Fists" numbered in the tens of thousands, and was marching on Peking. Lurid descriptions of the murders of Chinese Christians and foreigners filled the newspapers, and their attacks on Peking's foreign legations riveted readers around the globe.

On July 14 that year, front-page reports declared that foreign representatives in the isolated capital had been massacred, and the response from Western nations was visceral. Calls arose for the foreign troops amassing in Tientsin to burn the port city, where much of the trouble was centred, to the ground. Influential journalist Ambrose Bierce, of the San Francisco Examiner, proposed "a righteous war" with China that would "set the whole country ablaze in enthusiasm". Meanwhile, Wu, whose sources claimed legation staff were still alive, decried the inflammatory, unconfirmed reports and counselled calm.

These latest developments put the McKinley administration under enormous pressure to join European countries that saw the Boxer uprising as an opportunity to both punish China and partition it.

According to Reuters, Hay entrusted to Wu a US State Department cipher message with instructions to "spare no efforts or expenses" in getting it to the US minister to Peking Edwin Conger – if he was still alive.

Wu tapped his network of select viceroys in southern China to undertake the mission, and after one week, involving much derring-do by Chinese messengers and additional false alarms, they succeeded. On July 20, newspapers across the US reported the State Department had received, via Wu, an authentic encrypted message from a still very much alive Conger.

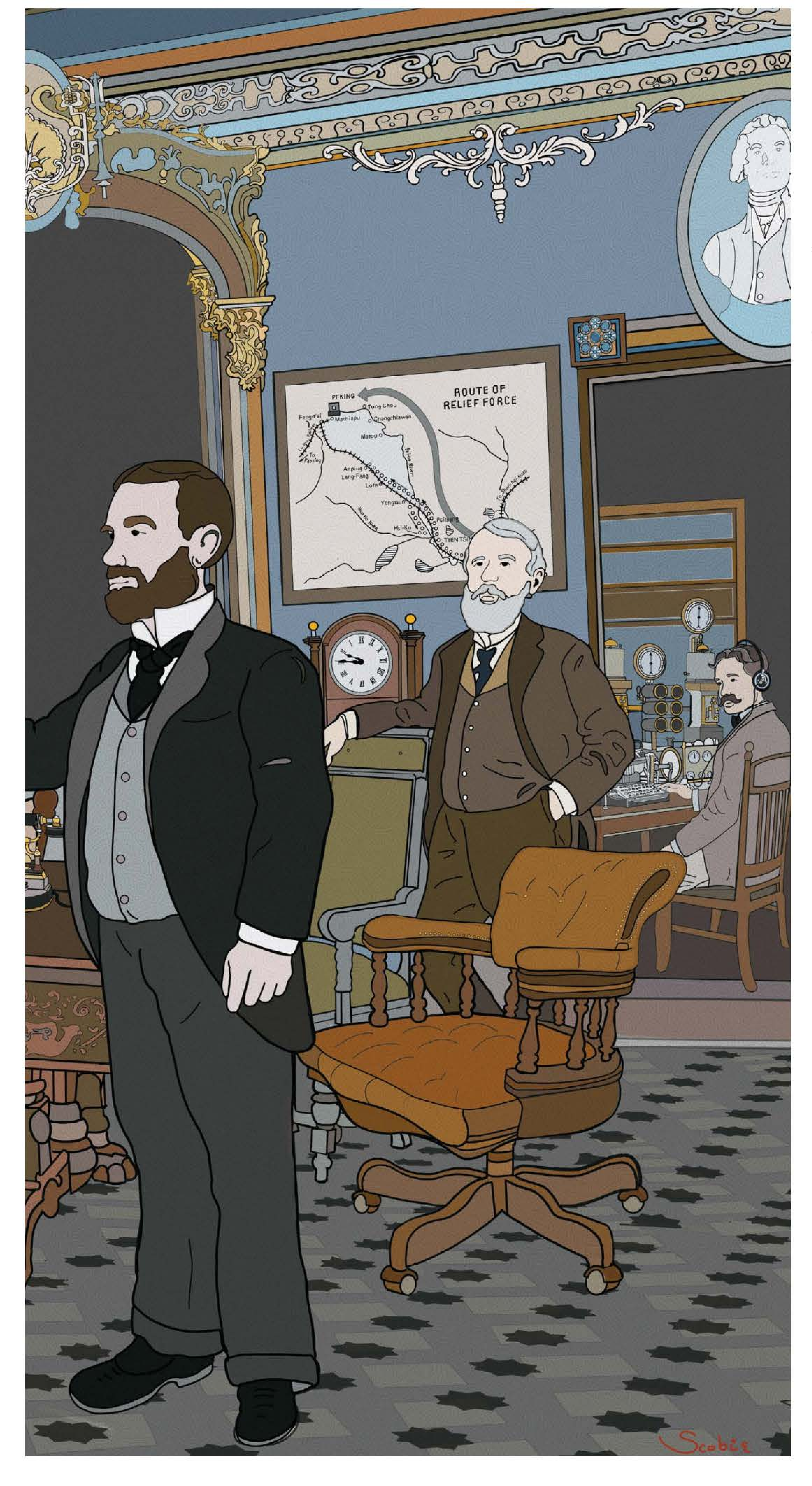
The news that Conger and the foreigners sheltering at the legations were alive was met with jubilation. Foreign troops were nearing Peking and authorities were sure time was on their side. The Pittsburgh Press assessed Wu's "conduct during the trying times" to be "beyond all praise".

Speaking officially for the American government, Hay reiterated that the US was not at war with China, and added that the goal of foreign powers continuing to mass in Tientsin should be to help the legitimate Chinese forces restore order, not to punish or invade.

The Washington Post devoted several columns to Wu's "astounding power" – even in the face of "the horrors enacted in China" and "the passions and prejudices inflamed" – to appeal to the goodwill and admiration of Americans. The Baltimore Sun, writing in December of 1900, described Wu as "the guiding force" in Hay's handling of the Boxer crisis.



A depiction of Wu delivering the historic Edwin Conger telegram to the US secretary of state, John Hay.



THE NEWS THAT CONGER AND THE FOREIGNERS SHELTERING AT THE LEGATIONS WERE ALIVE WAS MET WITH JUBILATION IN THE US.

With the uprising officially quelled in September 1901 and the threat of partition having receded, Wu, in his last two years as minister, rallied for one last great project: blocking the renewal of the Chinese Exclusion Act.

Initially, Wu made good progress. The Baltimore American observed Wu, in his speeches, articles and relationships with legislators, was "revolutionising public opinion with regard to his country". His core argument, that it was a strange thing to exclude a people because of their virtues such as intelligence, thriftiness and industry rather than their vices, struck home with many Americans. But Wu soon discovered that wading into debates on domestic policies affecting jobs was an entirely different thing than advocating for far-off concepts such as preserving China's territorial integrity. Wu's path would be further complicated by the assassination of McKinley by anarchist Leon Czolgosz in September 1901 and the subsequent elevation of the famously anti-corporate pioneer populist Theodore Roosevelt to the presidency.

In keeping with the country's new soured mood, in February 1902 the San Francisco Examiner – motto: "An American Paper for the American People" – linked Wu to a "conspiracy of businessmen to throw open the Golden Gate to the influx of the Mongol hordes".

On the Exclusion Act, the Convention of the American Federation of Labor denounced Wu in December 1901. In April 1902, the Los Angeles Times reported Wu was "bitterly attacked in the Senate" during debates on the Chinese Exclusion Bill for "his unusual interference in American legislative affairs". The Russell Record went so far as to describe Wu as a "public nuisance", adding that "not only the Chinese but this particular Chinese must go".

The San Francisco Examiner, conceding Wu's point, acknowledged that the Chinese were "kept out as much for their virtues as their vices" and openly endorsed a law to "exclude the people" with whom Americans "cannot compete". The San Francisco Chronicle crowed that the "hypnotic influence of Minister Wu" had been overcome, and that the general mood was to re-enact an even more comprehensive Exclusion Act.

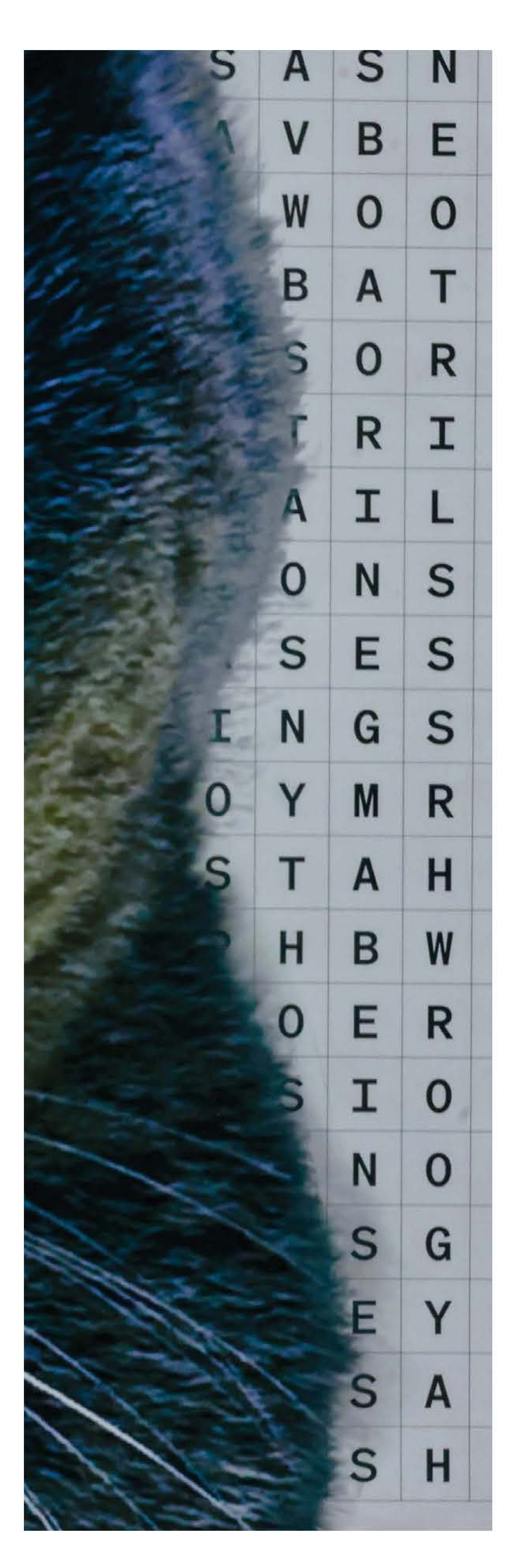
After working in the US for close to five years, well over the normally allotted three for Chinese diplomatic postings, Wu was recalled to Peking to play a key role in redrafting and modernising China's thousands-of-years-old penal code. He would rise to foreign minister and acting prime minister in the short-lived Chinese Republican government.

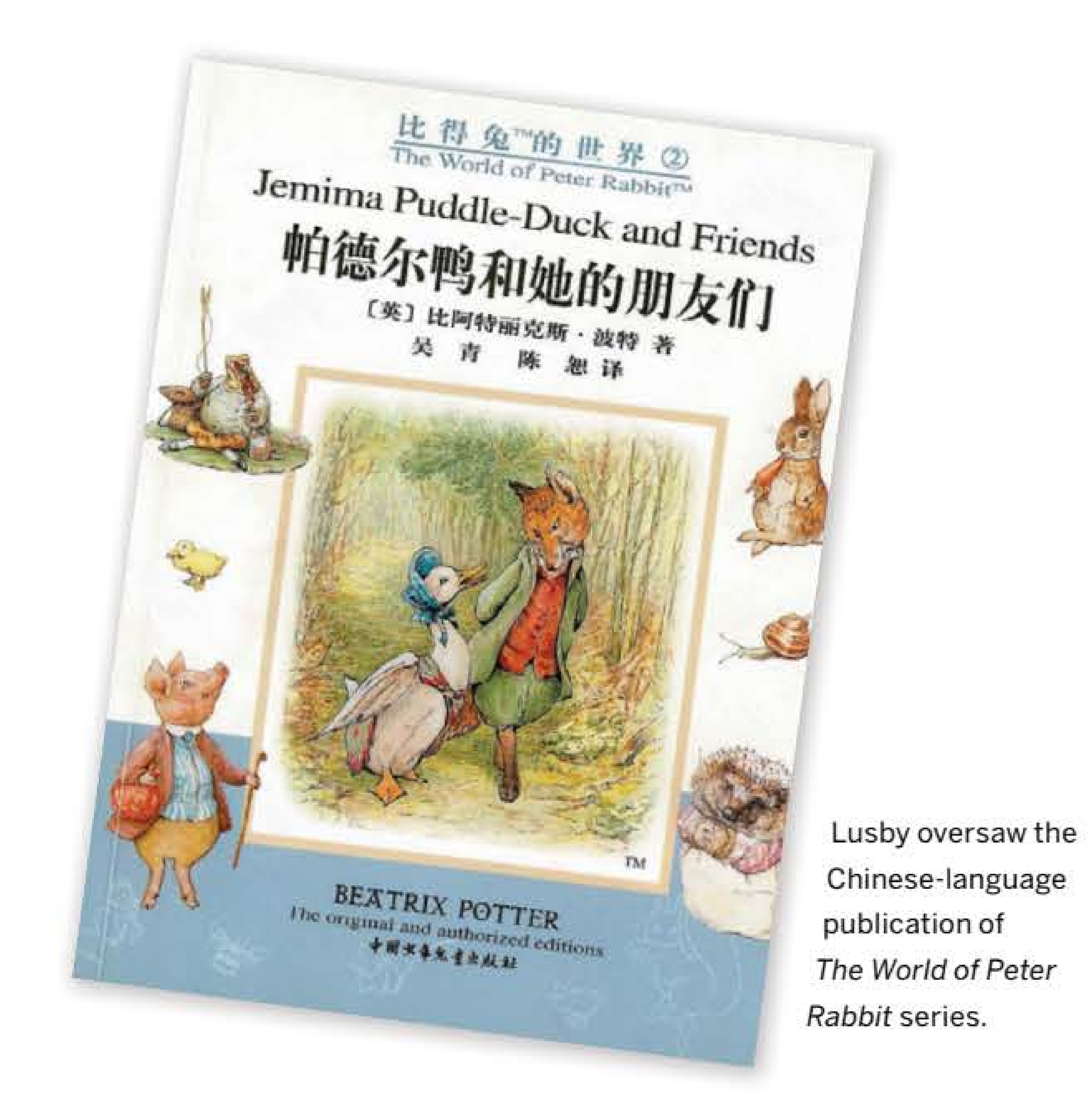
The man The Washington Post described as "a pretty good American" in that they saw in Wu what they most valued in themselves "energy, ability and a true democratic spirit" would die in 1922 at the age of 82. ■



The write stuff

Jo Lusby, at Tai Kwun, in Central.
Picture: Jonathan Wong





Lusby oversaw the Chinese-language publication of *The World of Peter Rabbit* series.

As a literary agent in Beijing, Jo Lusby was responsible for kick-starting Penguin's publishing in China, and the now Hong Kong-based entrepreneur, along with her wife, is continuing to conquer the book world with her author consultancy, Pixie B.

BY **MARK GRAHAM**

When newly appointed Penguin China general manager Jo Lusby hosted her international bosses in Beijing for the first time, in 2005, she suggested the publishing executives meet the author of a then-bestselling book, *Wolf Totem*.

On the face of it, a Chinese-language novel about wolves and shepherds written by a pseudonymous Beijing intellectual seemed unlikely to captivate an international audience. But the writer, Jiang Rong, charmed the executives with his atmospheric descriptions, based loosely on his time spent on the Inner Mongolian grasslands working with nomadic shepherds and observing the behaviour of wolves.

It was generally regarded as an allegorical work, and a thinly disguised criticism of the Cultural Revolution, which lasted from 1966-1976, a period that saw millions of people sent to work in the countryside, deprived of formal education. Jiang, who was jailed twice for his involvement in the Democracy Wall movement of 1979 and taking part in the Tiananmen Square demonstrations 10 years later, was fully aware that the subject matter was highly controversial and that the book's 2004 publication, originally in Chinese, could potentially land him in trouble.

Political undertones aside, it is a ripping yarn that hooks the reader from the first page with its thrilling account of wolves chasing their prey. The Penguin executives made a bid for the book there and then, putting forward US-dollar figures that left Lusby wide-eyed. It was the launch pad for a career that has seen her overseeing the publication of former United States first lady Michelle Obama's memoir, classic books from the extensive Penguin back catalogue and various bestselling children's titles such as *Peppa Pig*, *Charlie and Lola*, *Peter Rabbit* and *Spot the Dog*.

"My bosses were convinced it was a beautiful story," says Lusby. "They then said they could offer 'US$100,000 right here, right now'. They told the author and agent, 'If you want more, then we would have to go back and go through the formal appraisal process.' They all looked at each other briefly, and the author nodded vigorously and said, 'OK!'

"As we left, one of my bosses turned to me and said, 'You have just bought a book.'

"It did very well internationally. From its first English-language publication, in 2008, to 2012, it was the highest selling work of Chinese literature in English. That is my estimate. It was a New York Times bestseller and the wider international rights did well. It has been massively surpassed by *The Three-Body Problem* since then."

Another runaway success was *Midnight in Peking*, by (Post Magazine contributor) Paul French, about the murder of a teenage British girl in 1937 and the hunt to find her killer. It was published in 2011 and has sold hundreds of thousands of copies and been translated into 14 languages.

"With anything like *Midnight in Peking,* when you work on it all the way through it is less that you are surprised by its success, but gratified," says Lusby. "I only take on things if I believe there is a future audience for it. It is such an unpredictable curve; so many things can go wrong but if something resonates it is very fulfilling. The vice-president of marketing in

Below: Lusby with a copy of *Watch Me Grow: Panda*, an illustrated book by Penguin subsidiary DK. Picture: Mark Graham
Right: Lusby takes an erhu lesson in Nanjing in 1998. Picture: Jo Lusby



the US had been to China and he became obsessed with *Midnight in Peking*. When he got behind it, it felt like the wheels of momentum were rolling."

A 23-year-old Lusby found her first job in China in 1998, working as a teacher at Nanjing International Studies University, a role that included appearing before classes of uniformed People's Liberation Army soldiers, armed with a brief to upgrade their English and give a broader perspective on the outside world. Self-taught fluency in Mandarin, with an ability to read and write characters to an advanced level, made Lusby an attractive hire for Penguin, as well as being handy tools for negotiating daily life.

A later project was running a bilingual entertainment magazine, listing the limited nightlife options in Nanjing, a position that later led to an offer from an English-language Beijing lifestyle magazine in 2000 and, ultimately, the Penguin gig, and then a move to Hong Kong, where she now runs her own consulting agency for authors, Pixie B.

"My old boss at City Weekend magazine had a philosophy that in Beijing at that time you could be anything, regardless of your background," she says. "Beijing is one of those cities that gives itself up bit by bit – you are always finding other layers, communities and areas. It felt as though we were at the centre of something very important and it was rewarding, hard to separate work from social life. You were talking daily to thinkers and writers.

"We didn't realise then that it was a brilliant time to be there. We didn't appreciate how lucky we were. Socially I was eating lots of hot pots, drinking in little dive bars. At weekends, we went bike riding in the hills and also had an annual bike ride from Beijing to Inner Mongolia, 100km a day for four days. I was not fit but I was young!"

Lusby, now 49, was able to capitalise professionally on the emergence of China's affluent middle classes: internationally curious consumers who were willing to spend money on authentic books rather than badly printed knock-offs.

After joining Penguin in 2005, she presided over a growth from zero to 250 titles released annually, including the autobiography of tennis star Li Na, who attracted long lines of young men at book signings. Another job was to promote the novels of Nobel Prize for Literature winner Mo Yan internationally.

"His writing is not negative about China, but it is not flattering either," she says. "It is an honest portrayal of his own experiences. He got it from both sides. Because he was not a dissident, living in Beijing, and member of the Chinese Writers' Association, there was this perception in the West that he was a stooge, a patsy and his writing was somehow compromised because he was not independent from the government. He gave an interview and was asked about censorship and he said it is not always bad, he said there needs to be a harmonious society. That played badly in English but I have a lot of sympathy for him because you have to be pragmatic living in China."

Working in Beijing for so long made Lusby deeply aware of such sensitivities; it was one of the reasons Penguin appointed her general manager in China, later to become managing director, North Asia, despite no



Left: Lusby in Xanadu, in 2007, having cycled to Inner Mongolia from Beijing. Picture: Jo Lusby
Below: Lusby (right) with Margaret Wang, formerly the marketing director for Penguin Random House China, around 2008. Picture: Ben McMillan



"WE DIDN'T REALISE THEN THAT IT WAS A BRILLIANT TIME TO BE THERE [IN BEIJING]. WE DIDN'T APPRECIATE HOW LUCKY WE WERE. SOCIALLY I WAS EATING LOTS OF HOT POTS, DRINKING IN LITTLE DIVE BARS."

previous experience in the world of bookselling. There were numerous caustic remarks from expatriates in the media world, cynical naysayers who suggested Lusby might be out of her depth.

"I have always been an avid reader and have an English literature degree but I didn't know the book industry," says Lusby. "Penguin said, 'You teach us China, we will teach you books.'"

With the fast-talking, eloquent Lusby the anecdotes flow freely. Some of the most amusing are a little too delicate to publish, but on-the-record stories about politics and business in modern China are likely to emerge in a forthcoming memoir by outspoken and well-connected executive Jörg Wuttke, who spent more than three decades as a senior executive in China, most recently with BASF, and served as president of the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China, before a planned move this summer to the United States.

That book is part of a mixed portfolio in the stable of Pixie B, the Hong Kong company owned by Lusby and her South African wife, Michelle Lombard, the chief financial officer and strategic adviser. Pixie B acts as the exclusive agent for Harry Potter digital products in China, a role that has a strong focus on ensuring Chinese licensees do not tamper with author J.K. Rowling's work. The rules were bent slightly, to allow multiple narrators for the audiobooks, rather than the single voice that is more common in the West.

The entire series of seven books has now been committed to audio with each title available for subscription, at around HK$10, not a huge amount until you factor in China's population of 1.4 billion.

Another promising project is negotiating the digital rights to *The Three-Body Problem*, a Chinese sci-fi novel by Liu Cixin, published in 2008, that was later turned into a hit Netflix series. The role of Pixie B is to act as agent for *The Three-Body Problem*'s international content deals, beginning with audio drama content.

Also in the mix is a book on the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, by journalist Florence de Changy; the life story of Hong Kong animal rights activist Jill Robinson; and the tale of Chinese survivors of the Titanic, by American author Steven Schwankert.

An instinctive nose for a quirky project led to the signing of a young social-media influencer based in Chiang Mai, Thailand, who Lusby met at a book fair. Thai illustrator Sean B. Hiran has a digital following of 2.5 million and a proposed book, still in progress, titled *The Three Friends of Winter*, will feature inspirational life lessons told through a trio of cute animals.

Pets feature prominently in the life of the entrepreneurs; two dogs and two cats share their home in Mui Wo, Lantau, where they host regular rooftop gatherings. The social get-togethers often include literary-world acquaintances – Lusby is a previous co-chair of the Hong Kong Literary Festival.

French, *Midnight in Peking*'s London-based author, neatly summarises Lusby's professional and social skills: "For me she was an editor and a publisher and a lawyer and an agent all wrapped up in one," he says. His latest book, *Her Lotus Year*, about Wallis Simpson, due out in November, is another untold China story, documenting the future Duchess of Windsor's time in the country.

"Lots and lots of people were encouraged by Jo. People were always sending in manuscripts," French says. "The expat memoir is not a fantastic genre but there are always people who want to write and she was very encouraging, giving advice, from foreign correspondents who ended up doing really good books to people who were just bumming around. Beijing is such a small and febrile expat community, so saying no to people was always a little bit tricky as you could bump into them.

"If you were to ask Jo, she probably felt confident in my research skills and my knowledge of the world that I was writing about, but I don't know for sure that she was confident of my literary skills, nor was I particularly. She gave me the room to work my literary chops." ■

DESTINATION

Separate ways

A road trip around Okinawa Island reveals why locals consider themselves a people discrete from the rest of Japan, with its history and cuisine moulded by a rich Ryukyu past and South Pacific sensitivities.

WORDS BY **CAMERON DUECK**
PICTURES BY **FIONA CHING**

I arrived on Okinawa Island knowing only that it hosts a large United States military base and that tourists flock to its white-sand beaches.

A closer look at my map reveals museums, national parks and traditional villages, all spread out on an island that is more than 100km from end to end. Okinawa, I decide, is the perfect place for a road trip.

Okinawa is the largest of more than 150 islands in a prefecture of the same name, located far to the south of Japan's main islands.

We begin our two-day trip at the airport in Naha, the rather worn-looking capital city.

After figuring out how to change the navigation system on our rented *kei* car to English, we set off with a long list of potential destinations in hand.

Kei cars – the smallest category of expressway-legal motor vehicle in Japan – are tiny, but the interior space is maximised to accommodate several adults and their luggage with ease.

Our first stop is the Okinawa Prefectural Museum, in Naha, which gives us a better understanding of the Ryukyu Kingdom that once ruled this island chain.

Okinawa long served as a hub for traders from Japan, China and Southeast Asia, and only formally became a part of Japan in 1879, having been part of the Ming dynasty tributary system, wherein an envoy had to visit the Chinese emperor and kowtow, to maintain cordial relations.

To build on our newly acquired historical context, we move on to the Former Japanese Navy Underground Headquarters, which tells the story of one of the darkest moments in the closing days of World War II.

Thousands of troops crammed into this tunnel network for a desperate last stand during the Battle of Okinawa. The soldiers committed suicide rather than surrender, with the pockmarked walls of the operations room providing evidence of the grenades they used to end their lives on June 13, 1945.

For lunch, under a flyover near the harbour, we find the Tomari Iyumachi, a small wholesale seafood market. Rows of stalls are stocked with everything from tuna eyeballs to horse sashimi as well as local delicacies such as mozuku, a stringy seaweed served in vinegar, and sea grapes. We select a giant conch and a huge platter of sashimi, finding a spot on the crowded market tables in which to enjoy the feast.

Hitting the open highway, we put the busy streets of Naha behind us as we drive north on National Route 58, along the west coast of Okinawa. That's when I learn that the speed limit on the freeway is only 80km/h, while the limit on most of Okinawa's roads is 40km/h.

The tiny 0.7 litre engine on our Suzuki Hustler will be more than adequate, even as my heavy foot keeps us in the passing lane.

Given the speed limit – and our penchant for roadside cafes and ice cream stalls – some sights must be cut from out itinerary. Shuri Castle, the palace of the Ryukyu Kingdom, is struck from the list, as is Orion Happy Park, where Orion Beer is brewed. We drive right past the highly recommended Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium, which has one of the largest sea tanks in the world.

We thus buy ourselves time to stop at the small, and obscure, Sakima Art Museum, the first private art museum on the island. We have begun picking up on strong anti-American sentiments in Okinawa, and a dismissive attitude towards the remaining US presence; a bruise remaining on the collective psyche from the second world war and the harsh occupation that followed.

Sakima Art Museum is built on ancestral land that was taken to house the US Futenma Air Base but has since been partially returned, which is seen as a moral victory by Okinawans.

The permanent display of the massive *Illustrations on the Battle of Okinawa* painting, by husband and wife Iri Maruki and Toshi Maruki, documents the hardships experienced by the islanders. In particular, it tells how Okinawans felt caught between Japan, which they viewed as a colonial power, and the invading Americans, whom they feared.

This nuanced Okinawan identity also includes a strong South Pacific aspect, with colourful Hawaiian shirts a common sight on the streets, and a cuisine that leans heavily on indigenous culture as well as Chinese influences. When we're told that "Okinawa isn't real Japan", it's said with pride rather than a sense of falling short.

We gain a more intimate appreciation of this unique culture at Bise Village, outside the town of Motobu, on the northwestern coast of the island.

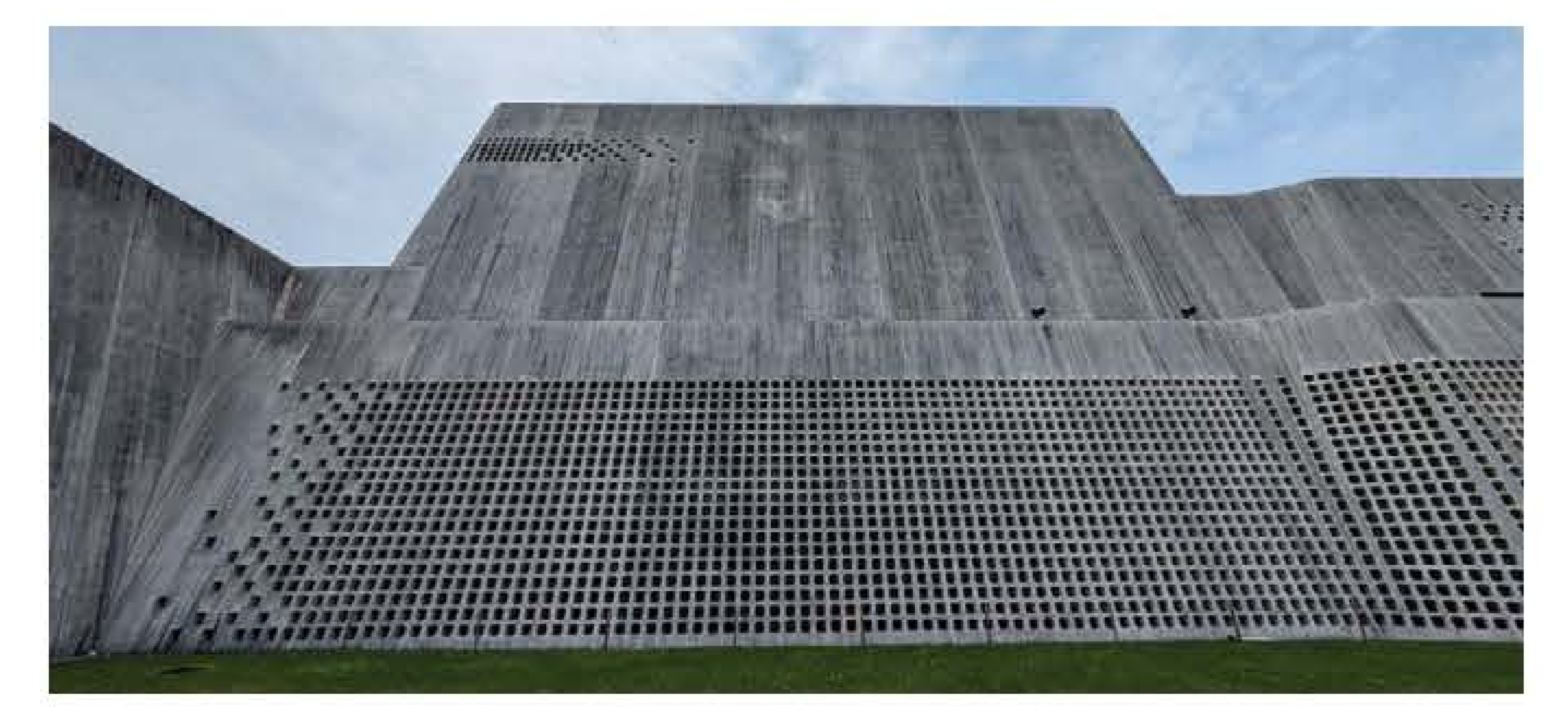
This quiet seaside village is shaded by the dense green foliage of row upon row of fukugi trees, which were planted 300 years ago to provide protection from the fierce typhoons that rake the island.

Bise contains about 250 homes built along sandy, tree-lined walking lanes.

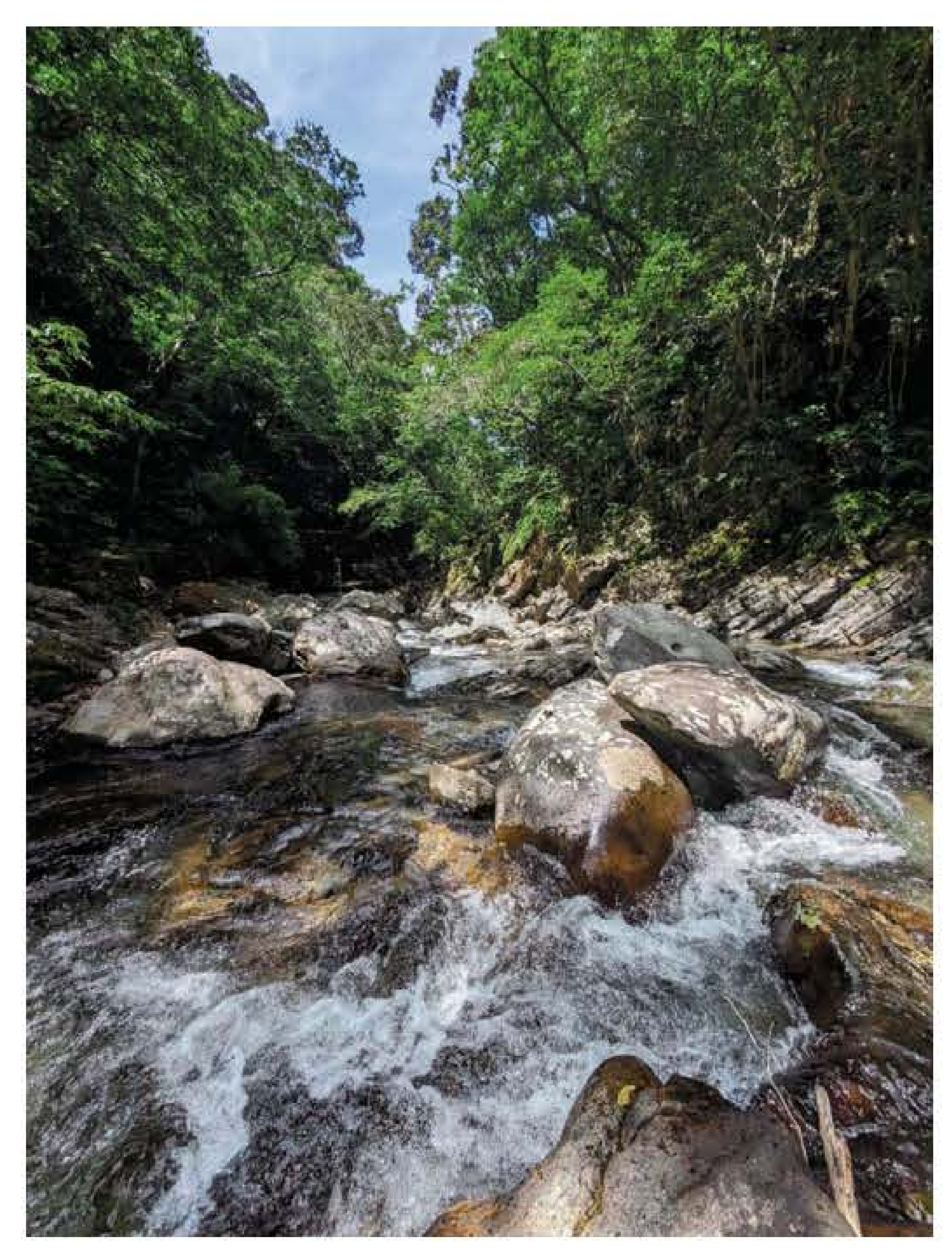
At the end of the tunnel-like Bise Fukugi Tree Road we find Chanyaa, a family-run collection of traditional homes, including the wooden house that once belonged to the owner's grandparents. Our lodging, though, is a new but traditionally built house complete with fragrant tatami mat rooms and sleeping futons.

That night, we're served Agu pork and Wagyu beef grilled on cast-iron plates at Chanyaa's restaurant, washed down with *awamori*, the indigenous liquor made from long-grain indica rice.

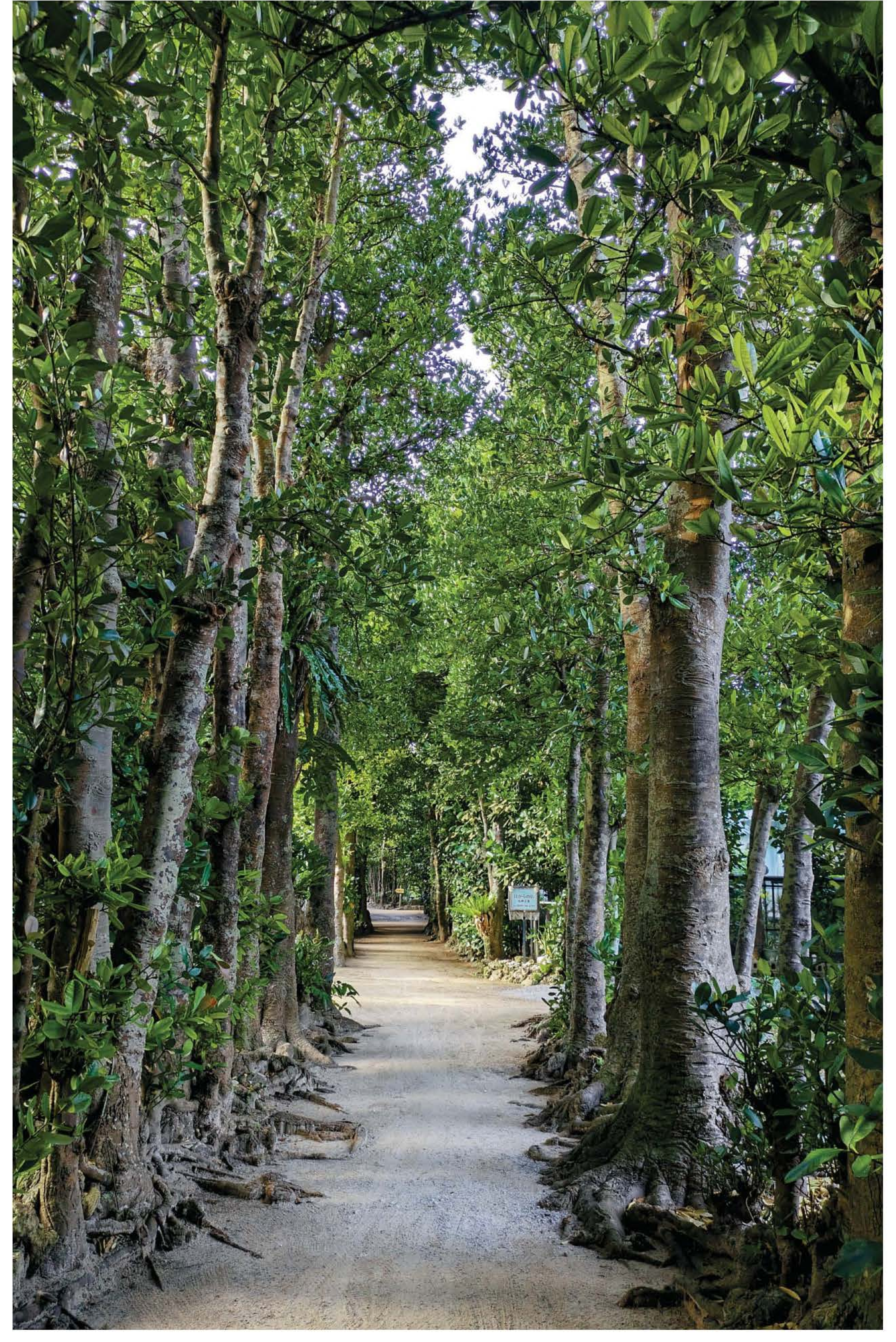
The next day, a short drive takes us to the expansive Yanbaru National Park, renowned for its mangrove forests, subtropical evergreen woodlands and waterfalls. It also contains Cape Hedo, the northernmost tip of Okinawa, where the blue Pacific Ocean turns to foam at the foot of rugged karst cliffs.







Clockwise from left: the Former Japanese Navy Underground Headquarters, in Okinawa, Japan; the Okinawa Prefectural Museum, in Naha; Hiji Waterfall, in Yanbaru National Park; a fukugi-tree-lined street in the village of Bise.



After a morning of admiring the nature through our windscreen, we buy rice balls at a convenience store and set off on a short hike up to the 26-metre Hiji Waterfall. Eating our lunch in the mist of the waterfall, surrounded by lush, tranquil forest, is a reminder that we are at the very opposite end of Okinawa from the bustling capital.

Our return route follows the east coast until near Ginoza, at the narrow waist of the island, where we cut across to the west coast and then continue south. The green, parklike north of the island is behind us and ahead, urban sprawl that stretches all the way to Naha.

We have time for one more stop before we return the car: the small city of Nanjo, which means "southern castle". Not only is Nanjo situated at the very southeastern corner of Okinawa, but it is surrounded by castle ruins.

Nearby is Sefa-utaki, a World Heritage site and once considered the most sacred spot within the Ryukyu Kingdom. Believers came to pray for prosperity and

WHEN WE'RE TOLD, "OKINAWA ISN'T REAL JAPAN", IT'S SAID WITH PRIDE RATHER THAN A SENSE OF FALLING SHORT.

plentiful harvests in this small tropical forest with jagged rock outcroppings.

The paths that wind through the gloomy woods are slippery with moss and water that seeps out of the rocks.

The Nanjo Art Museum is found in a traditional Japanese house that was once used as a women's finishing school, set in beautiful manicured gardens. A collection of international art hangs everywhere in the luxurious home-cum-gallery, from inside the toilets to the bedroom walls.

The museum also runs an artist-in-residence programme, and we watch as an Eastern European works on a large canvas in the middle of the glass-walled studio, ignoring the tourists gawping at her from outside.

From Nanjo, it is a quick drive back to Naha, where we check into a basic but comfortable three-star hotel and return the rental car.

That night we find ourselves in the dimly lit Parker's Mood Jazz Club, where a Japanese band plays American jazz standards, highlighting the complicated history of the island we've just circumnavigated.

FIGURED OUT | TIM PILE

How do you say it?



Passengers travelling to Kerala, south India, used to buy bus, train and plane tickets to Trivandrum ("Triv-AN-drum"), confident they were pronouncing the name of the city correctly. Then, in 1991, Trivandrum changed its name to Thiruvananthapuram ("tiru-wan-anta POOR-am") – and bookings to Goa surged.

OK, that's not entirely true but it's fair to say that some place names are harder to pronounce than others, and our often bungled attempts give locals reason to snigger.

Here's a collection of destinations that present a challenge for tourist tongues.

Iceland's **EYJAFJALLAJÖKULL** volcano gained worldwide attention when it erupted in the spring of 2010. Aircraft were grounded and newsreaders struggled with a collection of letters that would score highly in a game of Scrabble. The BBC suggested that "AY-uh-fyat-luh-YOE-kuutl-uh" was a pretty close approximation but if you find it too much of a mouthful, warm up with Iceland's capital, **REYKJAVÍK** ("Rake-ya-vick").

Over in neighbouring Greenland, cruise passengers have their work cut out mastering how to say **QEQERTARSUATSIAAT,** which means "the fairly big island". "Keck-er-tar-wahs-see-aah" is close enough.

Illustration: Huy Truong

From snow and polar ice to tropical beaches and aromatic spice plantations; Sri Lanka is home to plenty of places that trip up the unwary. Developed by British coffee and tea planters in the mid-19th century, the hill country settlement of **NUWARA ELIYA** is pronounced "Nu-REL-iya", although you could use its nickname, "Little England".

Also on the island formerly known as Ceylon, the beach town of **TRINCOMALEE** ("TRIHN-koh-mah-LEE") boasts a storied history as a military stronghold and ancient trading centre.

Talking of ancient trade, travellers visiting consonant rich **KYRGYZSTAN** ("KEER-ghiz-staan") relish the opportunity to drive, motorcycle or trek through some of the most remote terrain on Earth. The 1,200km Pamir Highway, the world's second highest road, follows what was once part of the Silk Road.

According to Tibetan legend, the goddess Wunosemo dropped her magic mirror, which shattered into more than 100 pieces to form the dazzling lakes, waterfalls and pools of **JIUZHAIGOU** ("jiu-jai-goh"), a nature reserve and national park in Sichuan province, China.

ULAANBAATAR ("oo-lahn-BAH-tuh"), Mongolia, translates as "Red Hero" and holds the distinction of being the world's coldest capital. Horses are central to the Buddhist nation's cultural identity and children learn to ride soon after they can stand.

Bangkok's **SUVARNABHUMI AIRPORT** counts its annual passenger traffic in the tens of millions, yet the number of tourists who can correctly pronounce the name of Thailand's principal airport – and the **SUKHUMVIT** area where they sleep, shop and socialise – is significantly lower. Go with "su-WAN na-poom" and "SOOK oom-wit".

Many newcomers get in a muddle when they try to pronounce the name of the holiday island **PHUKET.** "Ph" is a hard "p" sound in Thailand, not an "f", so it's POO-get, not FOO-get (or worse). Note, the "k" sound is closer to a "g".

Across the Mekong River, **LAOS** rhymes with "blouse" although locals and the former colonists, the French, pronounce it "Lao". The capital, **VIENTIANE,** resembles "vee-en-CHAN".

With its citadel, pagodas and Perfume River meandering lazily past, the central Vietnamese town of **HUÉ** is pronounced "hway", with a near silent "h".

In Taiwan's second largest city you can visit night markets, the Dragon and Tiger Pagodas Temple and enjoy a sunset cruise along the Love River while practising how to say **KAOHSIUNG,** which sounds like "gow-shung".

A number of United States destinations leave tourists tongue-tied. *Jurassic Park*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Avatar* were all filmed on the Hawaiian island of **KAUAI** (pronounced "ka-WA-ee"), which rhymes with Hawaii. Say **NEW ORLEANS** ("noo-OR-lins") rather than "nyoo-or-LEE-uhns", if you want to sound like a local. Meanwhile, **YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK**, California, flummoxes more than a few visitors. Stress the second syllable – "yoh-SEH-mi-tee", not "YOS-eh-mite".

In Latin America, the ancient Inca citadel of **MACHU PICCHU** ("MAH-choo PEE-choo"), in Peru, shouldn't pose too many pronunciation problems but the same cannot be said of one photogenic city in southern Mexico, renowned for its rich indigenous culture, colonial architecture and mouth-watering cuisine. Don't let the rogue "x" sabotage your attempts to pronounce **OAXACA.** It's "wa-HA-ka".

Over to Europe and what you see definitely isn't what you get with some Polish place names. **WROCLAW** morphs into "VROT-Swarv" and Łódź comes out as "Wootch". I once took a train from **RZESZÓW** ("Jeh-shuff"), the largest city in southeast Poland, to the town of **PRZEMYSL** ("she-mih-shul"). It's not often I've travelled between two places I couldn't pronounce.

The capital of the Caucasus country of Georgia is gaining attention in "best cities to visit" lists. **TBILISI** ("tib-lease-e") is renowned for the winding

vee-en-CHAN
su-WAN na-poom
SOOK oom-wit
MAUDdlin
bligh-na-fest-in-i-og
ka-WA-ee
ahn-ISS ah-bull
noo-OR-lins
Bister
MAH-choo PEE-choo
wa-HA-ka
DONE-leary
Jeh-shuff
tib-lease-e
ED-in-bruh
thessa-lon-NEE-ki
she-mih-shul
yoh-SEH-mi tee
Lester
Wootch

streets of its charming old town and historic buildings that showcase a blend of diverse architectural styles. And the Narikala Fortress, which offers panoramic views of the entire city.

Residents of **THESSALONIKI** ("thessa-lon-NEE-ki") have a word that sums up its way of life. *Halara* (ha-la-RAH) roughly translates as "take it easy" and reflects the relaxed outlook embraced by the citizens of Greece's second largest city. They'll forgive you for pronouncing the name of their city incorrectly.

In the English Midlands, **LEICESTER** confuses overseas visitors who divide the name into three syllables when only two are required. But once they realise it's "Lester" instead of "LIE-sester", they won't make the same mistake when they get to London's Leicester Square.

Chinese shoppers make up a significant percentage of visitors to **BICESTER VILLAGE** but how many are aware the Oxfordshire designer clothing outlet is pronounced "Bister" not 'Bye-sester"? Tours usually include a trip to the historic city of Oxford and its illustrious university. Keep in mind that **MAGDALEN COLLEGE** is pronounced "MAUDdlin", not "MAG-da-lin".

Home to one of the oldest narrow-gauge railways in the world, **BLAENAU FFESTINIOG,** is pronounced "bligh-na-fest-in-i-og". If you don't fancy getting caught in a downpour in Wales' wettest town, then head to **YNYSYBWL** ("ahn-ISS ah-bull"), if only to show residents that you've mastered how to say it.

Ireland has its share of linguistic traps but at least travellers arriving in the Emerald Isle by boat don't have to worry about pronouncing **DÚN LAOGHAIRE,** ("DONE-leary"), as ferries no longer serve the port south of Dublin.

Another phonological curiosity is the Scottish capital, **EDINBURGH.** Go with "ED-in-bruh", "ED-in-burra" or abbreviate it like a local: "EM-bruh". Only North Americans call it "EDIN-Burrow". ■

Watch this space

Designers are finding increasingly innovative ways to do more with less in small Hong Kong apartments, making them feel far bigger than they really are.

BY **PETA TOMLINSON**



Hong Kong flats are notoriously compact and yet we seem to endlessly have more stuff to fit in. How do one or more occupants accommodate all of life's necessities without creating domestic chaos?

Many ideas for living large in a tiny home are not new, but innovative tweaks can certainly enhance the outcome. Take underfloor storage. Stepping up to a platform with customised compartments underneath allows a horizontal wardrobe to be built in a bedroom that has little wall space to spare.

So, when Norman Ung, co-founder of Design Eight Five Two (DEFT), had just 266 sq ft to work with inside his Tai Wai micro flat, a platform was an obvious solution.

He did not stop there. To achieve the goal of creating the same comfort and space afforded by larger homes, Ung also made the platform transformable.

Occupying almost all of the open-plan layout, the platform holds a mattress on one side and a wall unit and reading nook on the other. In the middle, a hydraulically operated table rises up from the elevated floor, negating the need for either a dining setting or a desk 24/7. The platform aligns with the existing bay window so a streamlined look is achieved, its ash wood finish adding a designer touch.

Still needing space to store larger items, Ung also created a cavity next to the front door – a space hitherto wasted. Meanwhile, behind a partition holding a television is a series of deep, pull-out drawers he designed to disappear, maintaining the minimalist aesthetic desired.

Ung, together with partner Peter

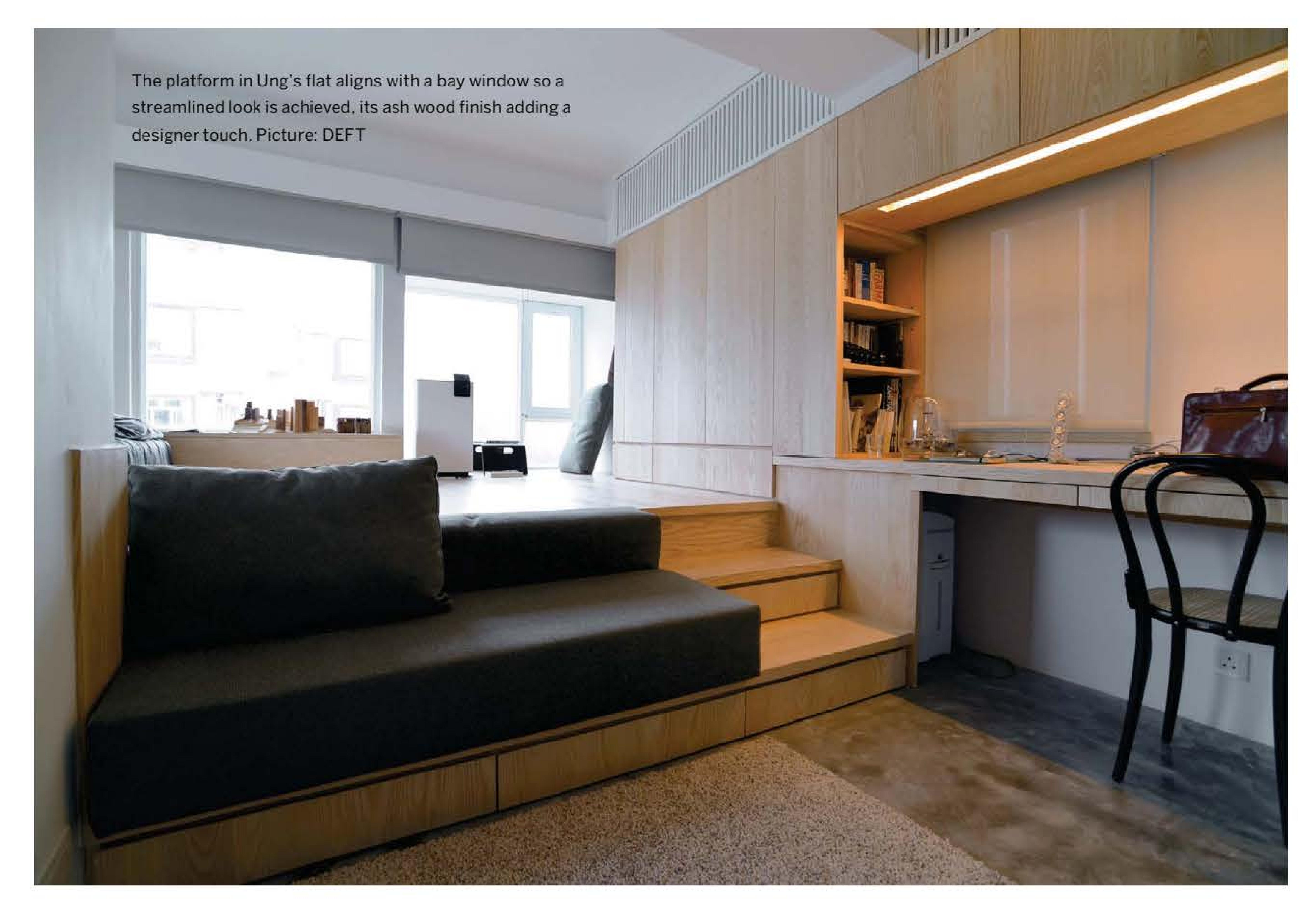


LAAB's refurbishment of a Kowloon flat adds bespoke elements that help streamline the interior and emphasise the sweeping harbour views. Picture: Otto Ng



Norman Ung, co-founder of Design Eight Five Two (DEFT), created a platform in his tiny Tai Wai flat that holds a mattress on one side and a wall unit on the other. In the middle is a hydraulically raised table that serves as a desk and dining table. Picture DEFT





The platform in Ung's flat aligns with a bay window so a streamlined look is achieved, its ash wood finish adding a designer touch. Picture: DEFT

Lampard and the DEFT design team, have brought such concepts to a range of projects where space must be optimised, including residential units, Weave Living's serviced apartments in several Hong Kong locations, and the recently completed Sunny House accommodation for students and young professionals in San Po Kong.

Another option, if headroom allows, is to create a mezzanine. Patrick Lam Kwai-pui, founder of Sim-Plex Design Studio, used this technique for a client who wanted both a larger entertainment space and a dedicated area for yoga practice in her 400 sq ft Kowloon apartment. The key to Lam's solution lay in the flat's 3.4-metre-high ceiling.

After demolishing the walls of two tiny bedrooms, Lam installed an elevated platform suspended 1.8 metres above the expanded, open-plan living area.

Left: JAAK Design obscured the stairs in this Kennedy Town duplex to lessen its dominance in the living/dining area. Picture: JAAK Design

The stainless-steel structure, which permanently holds a double bed and desk, is accessed via a folding staircase operated by remote control. The motor is hidden within new living room cabinetry, as are various storage compartments, keeping the whole space uncluttered.

According to Lam, creating two spaces where once there was one overcomes the dilemma of homeowners wanting, but not being able to afford, a larger apartment.

Even if your flat is double-storey, having multiple small rooms can make the space feel tight. One way JAAK Design overcomes this is by toning down the appearance of structural elements.

In the remodel of an 850 sq ft Kennedy Town duplex, the staircase sat incongruously at the head of the dining table, dominating the living/dining area. To soften the aesthetic, JAAK's team shielded the stairs with a decorative wooden screen.

JAAK co-founder Calvin Cheng Ka-ming says the screen, inspired by traditional Japanese shoji, which are usually made with translucent white paper, has become the apartment's design focus. "It changes the bulky feeling of traditional stair railings and becomes a feature wall behind the dining table." Rattan and reeded glass are other materials suitable for building a screen in a smaller flat, he says.

Otto Ng, design director at LAAB, also takes inspiration from Japanese space-saving techniques. "In sharing the problem of space limitation, I think there is a lot Hong Kong and Japan can learn from each other," he says. "However, in order to work, our design also needs to be context-specific. For example, Hong Kong has very different weather



This apartment's 3.4-metre-high ceiling allowed Sim-Plex Design Studio to install a stainless-steel structure that accommodates a double bed (not seen) and a desk. Picture: Sim-Plex Design Studio

conditions compared to Japan, so we need to be careful when it comes to material selection."

At 667 sq ft, the Kowloon apartment he refurbished in 2022 was not exactly small, but the owners wanted a tranquil space, where they could enjoy the company of family and friends.

"Our design approach was rooted in the principles of simplicity and mindfulness, prioritising the elimination of clutter through various space-saving strategies," Ng says. This is achieved through a range of bespoke elements that, in streamlining the interior, emphasised the sweeping harbour views.

With the addition of a sliding oak and brass desk that glides along the living room windowsill, an unobtrusive work station is created, commanding one of the best views in the flat.

A custom-designed tapparelle screen (rolling shutter) incorporates a television on both sides, while pocket doors can be deployed to divide the living room and main bedroom as needed.

Tailoring storage cabinets to the specific dimensions of the owners' household essentials is another way of optimising every nook and cranny.

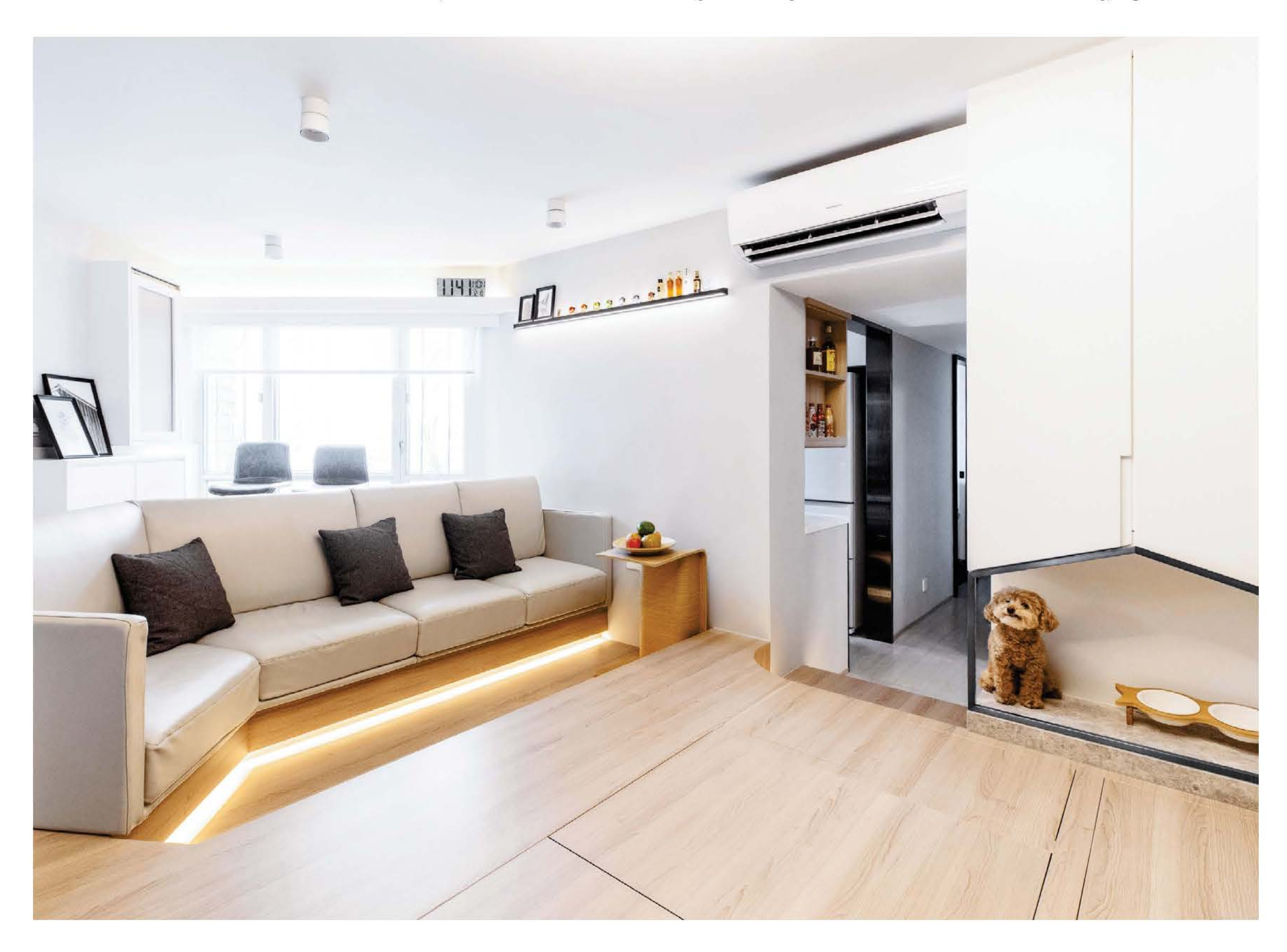
And regardless of limited space, a pet is a cherished member of many Hong Kong households. They have their habits just like us: preferred sleeping spots, dining areas and places for exercise and play, says Karr Yip, founder of ADO.

"If these arrangements are not made, pets may exhibit unusual behaviour such as urinating or defecating in undesirable places, or constantly interrupting while you are watching TV or working," he says. "In a shared living space, careful planning allows everyone to live harmoniously, build relationships and avoid interfering with each other."

ADO's solutions have included a sofa designed for human and feline comfort upholstered in a special soft, scratch-resistant, easy clean and water repellent fabric, with cut-outs underneath for cats to hide and sleep.

In a separate project, removable cushions on a wood veneer banquette keep the dining area free from cat hair and claw damage.

"We have also designed decorative shelves on living room walls doubling as jumping platforms for cats, and high-level shelves near the ceiling," Yip adds.

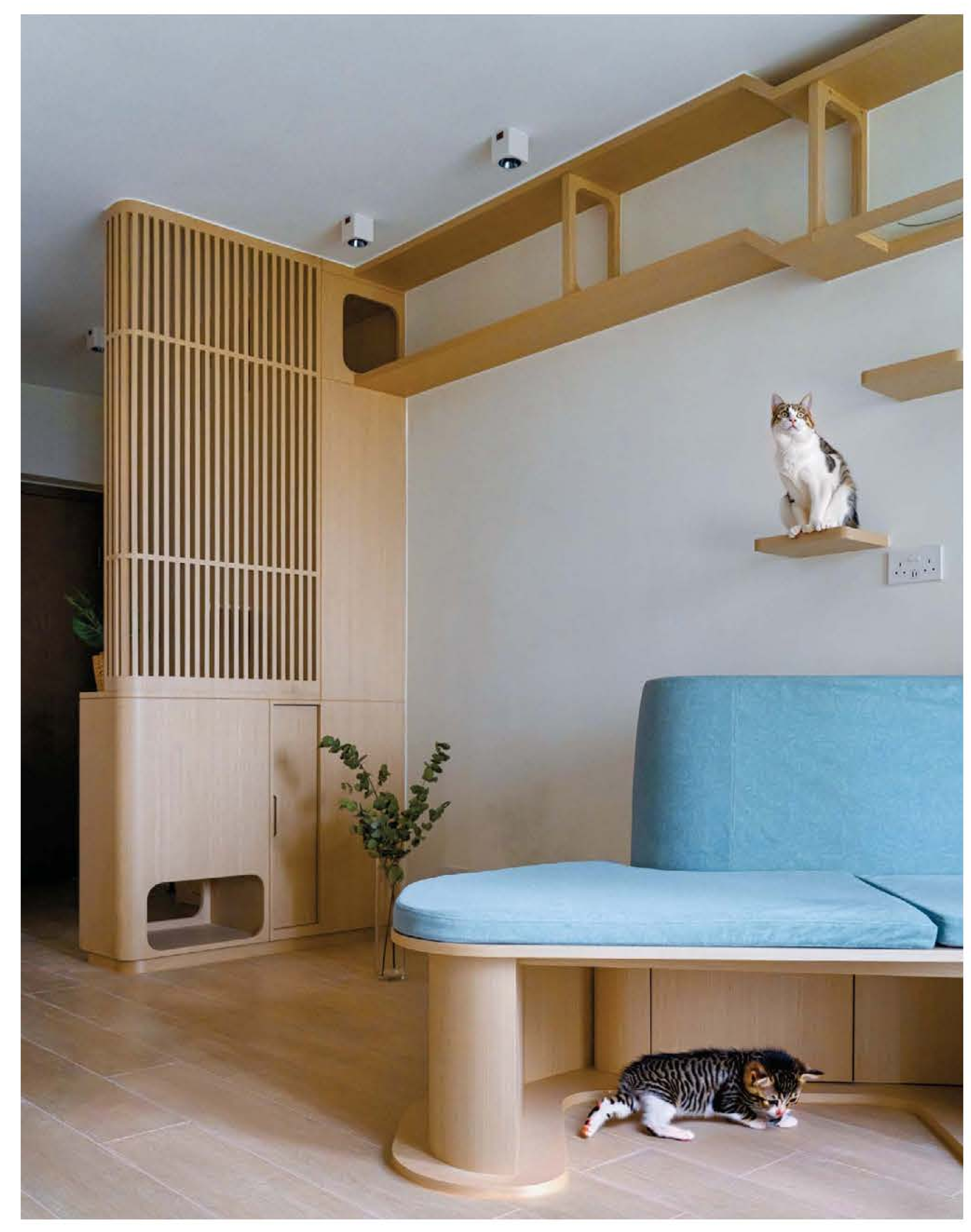


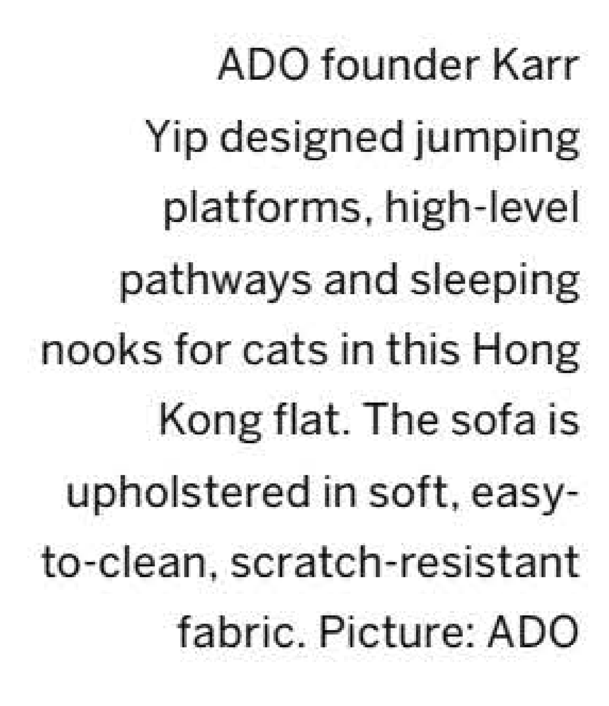
MAD Studio created space in the cabinetry of a Diamond Hill apartment for a dog bed and water and food bowls. Picture: MAD Studio

"Creating a pathway for the cats to walk on and rest integrates the living spaces for the owner and their pets, allowing for a harmonious coexistence."

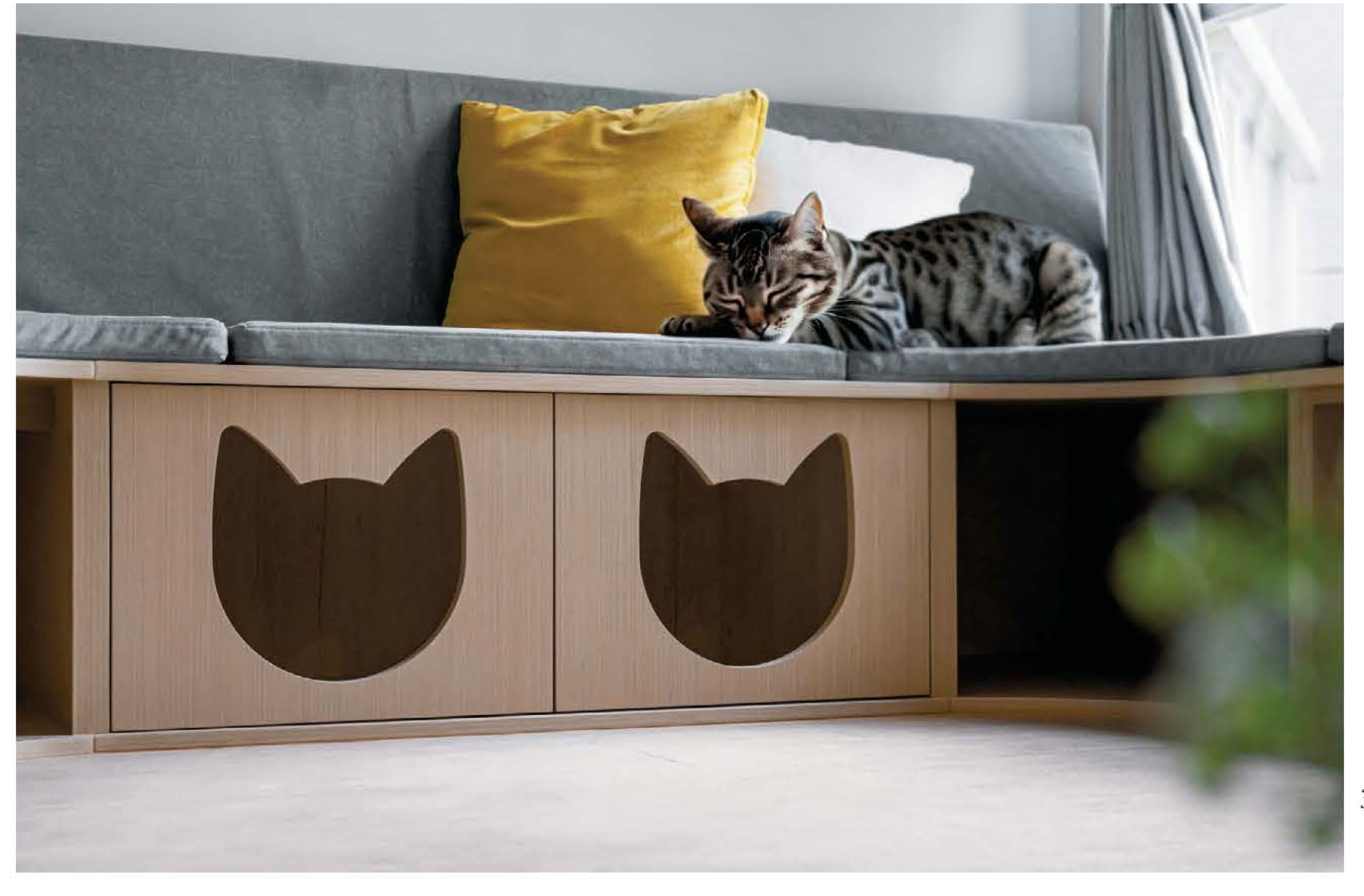
Alvin Cheng Ka-heng, creative director at MAD Studio, adds that dogs can be catered for, too. Integrating a dedicated space for a cherished pup into the living room cabinetry of one 650 sq ft Diamond Hill flat met this need perfectly, with the area holding the dog's bed and, during the day, bowls for food and water.

"Integration allows one's pet best friend, being an important member of the household, to have its own cosy space like the rest of the family members," Cheng says. "As this project shows, it also adds playfulness to the overall design." ■





ADO founder Karr Yip designed jumping platforms, high-level pathways and sleeping nooks for cats in this Hong Kong flat. The sofa is upholstered in soft, easy-to-clean, scratch-resistant fabric. Picture: ADO



In this Hong Kong flat, Yip designed a sofa, upholstered in water-repellent fabric, for pets and people, with compartments underneath for cats to hide and sleep (pity no one told this tabby!). Picture: ADO

A cut above

Chef Masaaki Miyakawa raised the bar for Hong Kong sushi a decade ago, helping the Sheung Wan eatery he headed earn a third Michelin star. Now he's back in the region, with his own place at Macau's Raffles hotel.

BY **WINNIE CHUNG**

Those who remember the early days of Sushi Shikon, a tiny omakase place hidden in the Mercer Hotel in Sheung Wan, would probably remember chef Masaaki Miyakawa deftly slicing fish behind the sushi counter.

In his short two years there, from 2013 to 2014, Miyakawa took the restaurant from two to three Michelin stars before returning to his Hokkaido home to open his own eponymous restaurant.

He proved that what he achieved with Sushi Shikon was no fluke. Within three years, Sushi Miyakawa was lauded with three Michelin stars, making it the only three-star sushi establishment in Hokkaido and one of only five around the world.

He has since opened Sushi Shin – one in Niseko and one in Tokyo – and now the sushi maestro is back in the Greater Bay Area to open his first restaurant outside Japan, at the new Raffles hotel in Galaxy Macau.

For Miyakawa, opening Sushi Kissho in Macau is a homecoming of sorts. He remembers frequent trips to the enclave during his time in Hong Kong, to refresh and unwind when things got a little too overwhelming.

"Hong Kong and Macau are full of memories for me. I was having a hard time in the first few months in Hong Kong as I had to adjust my style of working or communicating with the staff," says Miyakawa. "I was very tired, and I came [to Macau] a lot to walk around nature to refresh myself."



The spacious sushi counter at Sushi Kissho by Miyakawa.

Sushi Kissho chef Masaaki Miyakawa. Pictures: Sushi Kissho

"IN JAPAN, I WANTED TO FOCUS ON THE TASTE, BUT HERE I WANT TO SHOW WHAT MY STAFF AND I ARE DOING. I THINK THE DINERS ENJOY THAT, TOO. IT'S LIKE A KIND OF ENTERTAINMENT."



A selection of Edomae-style sushi at Sushi Kissho by Miyakawa.

Sushi Kissho serves Edomae sushi, a traditional style that originated in the Edo period (1603-1868) in what is now Tokyo. "Edomae" literally translates to "in front of Edo" or "in front of Tokyo Bay".

Edomae sushi chefs use the freshest seasonal ingredients from the Tokyo Bay area, preparing them with specialised techniques including curing, ageing and marinating.

Although Macau may not be as logistically convenient, given its limited number of daily flights bringing in fresh seafood, Miyakawa's good relationship with Japan's top suppliers means his Macau diners will still get the freshest seasonal ingredients.

"They know what I want and I know what they have, so I trust them to send the freshest seafood. That's the most important thing. Then we have to make sure we transport them at the right temperature – zero degrees – so that the quality can be maintained," he says.

The main difference between his restaurants in Japan and Sushi Kissho is that the food-preparation process will be more on show in Macau compared with the more traditional setting of his Japanese outlets.

"In Japan, I wanted to focus on the taste, but here I want to show what my staff and I are doing. I think the diners enjoy that, too. It's like a kind of entertainment. For instance, in Japan we may do the *aburi* [flame-sear] in a corner but in Sushi Kissho you will be able to see 90 per cent of what is going on."

Miyakawa's journey to culinary distinction began in the rural town of Asahikawa, where his skills blossomed despite his family's non-culinary background. After graduating from high school, his passion for sushi led him to Sushiden Kenzan, in Tokyo, where he met chef Masahiro Yoshitake, his future mentor and master.

Over the next seven years, Miyakawa immersed himself in the art of sushi-making, honing his skills and developing a deep appreciation for the nuances of flavour and texture.

A stint back in Hokkaido and a foray into fine French cuisine further broadened his culinary horizons. Although his passion was always sushi, his French culinary experiences taught him about sauces, which he now tries to incorporate into his cooking.

Miyakawa had been thinking of moving home to Hokkaido to open his own restaurant when Yoshitake invited him to head up Sushi Shikon in Hong Kong, a collaboration that culminated in Sushi Shikon's three-star distinction in 2014, solidifying Miyakawa's reputation as a master of his craft.

"The plan had always been to open my own restaurant. In fact, I was about to return to Hokkaido to do so when Yoshitake-san asked me to help him with the opening of Sushi Shikon [a rebranding of Sushi Yoshitake, which opened in 2012]. It was also a great opportunity for me to learn. So we agreed that I would stay for two years to help him," says Miyakawa.



Black abalone with liver sauce, one of Masaaki Miyakawa's signature dishes, also features at Sushi Kissho.

Returning to his roots in Hokkaido, Miyakawa founded his eponymous restaurant, Sushi Miyakawa, in 2014. In 2017, he launched Sushi Shin by Miyakawa in Niseko, followed by a Tokyo outpost at the Mandarin Oriental in 2019.

His brief time in Hong Kong was informative. With more opportunity to interact with his diners, he learned how to introduce the fish in Cantonese. The more casual dining experience also opened up a new world of champagne and wine for the chef.

"When I was in Hong Kong, a lot of the customers would bring very good wine for their meals, and they would often invite me to drink with them. I was very interested. When they left, I would take photos of the bottles and go learn about the wine and champagne. When I opened my own restaurant, I wanted to have a wine cellar, too," says the 53-year-old.

Despite his assumptions that Japanese diners were more of a sake and beer demographic, Miyakawa was pleased to discover that his countrymen also appreciated good wine. "A lot of Japanese people know about wine and champagne but they were surprised that a sushi restaurant would have them."

The chef has tailored some of his dishes to these connoisseurs' tastes, for instance starting with lighter fruits and vegetables – such as Hokkaido corn pudding with sea urchin – that go better with wine.

The black abalone and liver sauce, one of chef's most memorable dishes at Sushi Shikon that remains on the menu today, also makes an appearance, albeit with some tweaks in the recipe. The seafood, naturally, will depend on what the day's catch in Japan will be.

To make sure that his Macau guests get the real Miyakawa experience, the chef has installed two long-time cohorts, Norihisa Maeda and Hironori Satake, as executive chefs.

Sushi Kissho will be offering two dinner omakase menus at 1,888 patacas and 2,888 patacas.

Although he won't be able to make it to Macau as often as he does his Japanese establishments, Miyakawa promises he will be in the enclave at least three to four times a year. "Of course, there will be some gaps but we will be communicating constantly with each other," he says. Just keep an eye out for the announcements.

OFF THE PLATE | JENNY LAU

The rules of engagement

How to navigate the culinary minefield in a mixed-race relationship.

So you and your beau have been dating for a while. You've met each other's besties and been given the thumbs up. The apps have been deleted and you've soft-launched the relationship status in an Instagram story. There's a set of your things at their place. You went on your first holiday together and didn't murder each other. You may even have said the L-word by now.

But there's one final hurdle that will test the compatibility of your relationship: meeting and eating with the family. Oh, and the wild card? You're Chinese, they're not.

"Are the White Husbands invited?" My Chinese girlfriends like to share this private joke in our WhatsApp group every time we plan to meet up. To clarify: "White Husband", in my eyes, is a demographic that includes White Boyfriends, White Girlfriends and any type of serious partner who is not Chinese.

The real subtext of the question is that if the White Husbands are coming, we regrettably won't get to eat the foods that we really want to eat. It's been known for my friends and I to uninvite them, just so we can eat our kimchi and durian in our safe, judgment-free space.

And even though I don't have a White Husband any more, it got me thinking: as people who are so particular about our food, how do we work through the dietary clashes that come with entering a multicultural relationship?

So heed ye, all potential White Husbands! Should you wish to ingratiate yourself into your Chinese partner's family, read this advice carefully, for the dining table will be the true test of your relationship …

I started my research by asking my British Chinese friends what their multicultural-relationship deal-breakers were. The same grievances came back to me, such as a new partner's insistence on ordering their own dish rather than eating family style, or being fussy about trying different foods.

But if there was one dish that seems to cause the most anxiety, it would without a doubt be the presence of a whole steamed fish on the table. This is made all the more emotionally significant by the fact that this is "fancy" Chinese home-cooked fare, meaning that someone's mother (typically) has gone to the market that day to choose the biggest, freshest snapper or sea bream she can afford.

My friend Y fumed as she recounted how her husband who – when the fish head was swivelled towards him, in the customary gesture of respect to the guest of honour – could not swallow anything more than rice and vegetables for the duration of the meal.

Illustration: Mario Rivera



I am sympathetic to those who never grew up learning to appreciate a whole fish – eyeballs, gills and all – let alone navigate it with a pair of chopsticks, but I also understand how this touched a nerve for Y.

Alcohol is another grey area. While Westerners might think nothing of downing a few beers and glasses of wine with their dinner, it is still considered off-limits at the Chinese family meal, especially in the presence of the more conservative elder generation. It would not hurt to observe what others are drinking, and to only accept booze if it's offered. If in doubt, drink tea.

On the flip side, my friend S recounted how her British boyfriend won over her intimidating father – an ex-narcotics cop, of all things – by going on an all-night *baijiu* bender in Beijing with him, despite neither of them speaking the other's language.

Some of my friends felt alienated by their partners' attitudes to their food customs. These attitudes could be as innocuous as bemusement about the obsession with not just eating food, but talking about eating food – to the point that you might be enjoying one delicious meal while planning the next – to as upsetting as calling certain food preferences weird or gross.

I do think there are few things sadder in a relationship than not being able to enjoy the same food, or at least not having matching appetites. There will always be compromise, but I've heard of people changing their diets for their partners to the point of feeling like they're suffering a slow, self-inflicted cultural death.

It's when children enter the equation that I see my friends reinvigorated to fight their corner, hoping to instil an appreciation for Chinese food in their mixed-race kids.

I was, however, heartened to hear of more triumphs than horror stories. White Boyfriends, you're in luck; the bar is pretty low for you guys. Apparently all you need to impress the Chinese parents is to use chopsticks correctly, learn a few Chinese phrases of appreciation and train your stomach to be a bottomless compost bin.

I have heard hilarious anecdotes about White Boyfriends valiantly working their way through plates that seemed to magically reload themselves. "Freshman 15" has nothing on dating a Chinese girl.

For extra brownie points, my friend H taught her husband to eat chicken meat clean off the bone, signalling to her parents that he had both epicurean and frugal sensibilities.

The same standards don't apply to White Girlfriends though, who apparently harbour a masochistic death wish for attempting to date a Chinese mother's precious baby boy. According to my friend B, by their second month of dating, his German girlfriend had been subjected to merciless interrogation about her childbearing plans.

Her physical health became a matter of communal concern among the interfering aunties, though she eventually proved her credentials by learning to boil her mother-in-law's tonic soups.

At the end of the day, the White Husbands might ask, "Why do we need to get it right when eating with family?" It's not just that food is particularly important to Chinese culture, rather that the dining table is a theatre for past, present and potential familial relationships to play out.

Mastering the etiquette and doublespeak of Chinese food customs can seem as impossible to codebreak as the language itself. Just as birds of paradise circle each other in an elaborate song and dance, a shared meal is an exercise for both parties in "face": one in which you maintain yours while giving prestige to the family whose daughter or son you are trying to woo. It's a chance to prove that you are worthy of being in the family.

With that in mind, these are my final tips for all the White Husbands hoping for a harmonious relationship over food. If there is an absence of shared language, you must speak with actions. Be deferential. Serve elders, children and your partner before yourself. Don't take too much but also don't refuse food.

Don't yuck anyone's yum. Compliment your in-laws profusely on the dish you love the most but be warned: they will cook it for you repeatedly until you can't stand the sight of it any more.

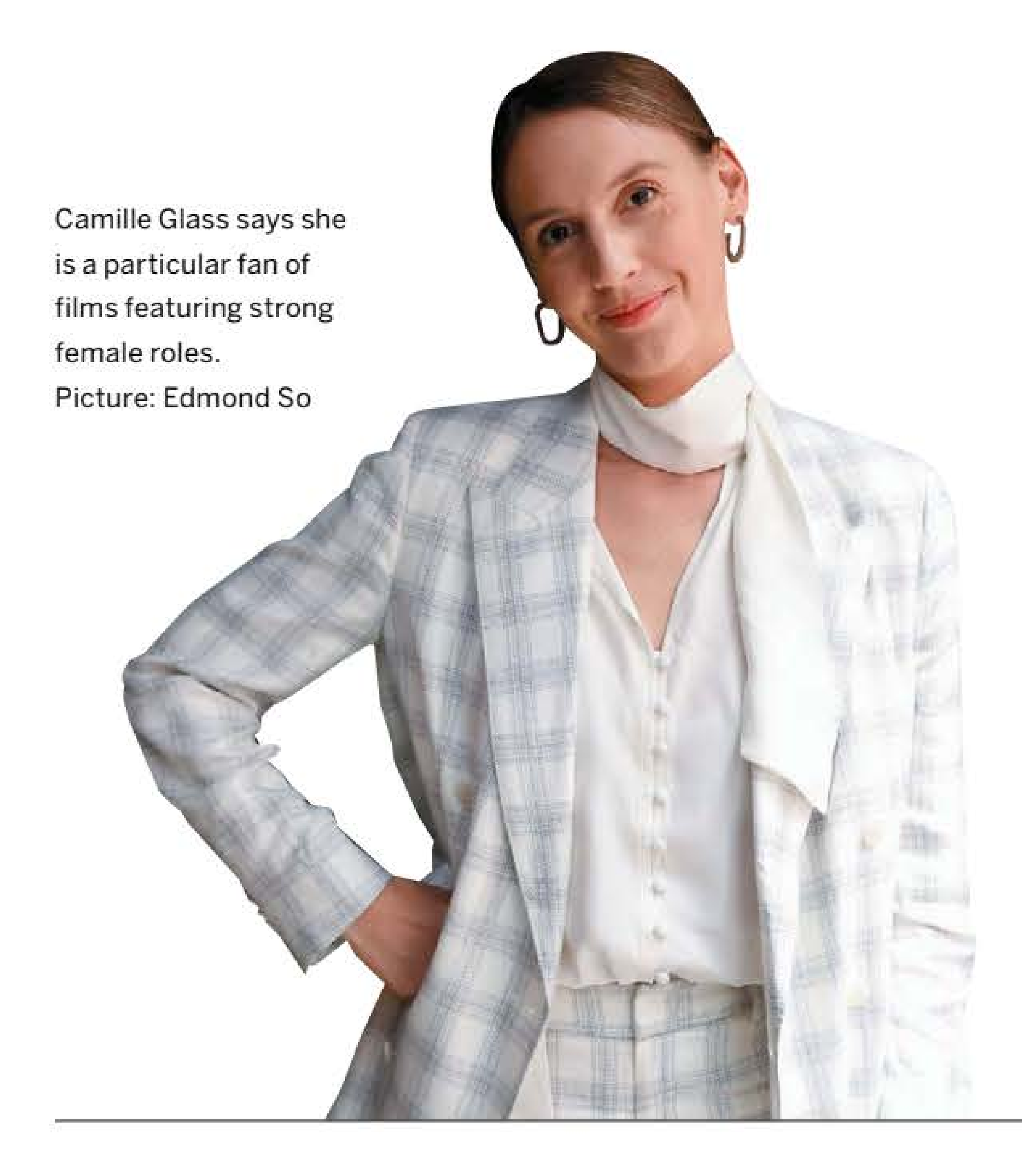
Never show up to any gathering empty-handed, even if you assume you're going to be footing the bill (it's not unusual for fisticuffs to erupt over paying, but at the same time I would not advise punching your future father-in-law).

In our culture, we keep the metaphorical receipts; imagine a mental accounts book that tallies the ongoing exchanges of hospitality. A gift of well-selected fruit is always considered a thoughtful gesture. If all else fails, learn from my proudest achievement: teaching my White Husband to call restaurants a day ahead to put down his credit card.

Smashing times

Camille Glass, co-founder of wine bars Brut and Crushed in Sai Ying Pun, shares her top five films, from a Miyazaki classic to a Nazi Germany comedy.

BY **KYLIE KNOTT**



Camille Glass says she is a particular fan of films featuring strong female roles. Picture: Edmond So

French-American entrepreneur Camille Glass is a rising star in Hong Kong's drinks scene. The co-founder of wine bars Brut and Crushed, both in Sai Ying Pun, is known for championing no/low-intervention wines – wines fermented without additives using traditional winemaking methods – as well as wines that support biodiversity and women and minority winemakers.

Films are also one of her passions, particularly those featuring strong female roles. Here she shares her five favourites.

1 HER (2013)

There are many reasons this Spike Jonze-directed film is at the top of Glass' list. She loves science fiction and is a huge fan of its two leads, Joaquin Phoenix and Scarlett Johansson.

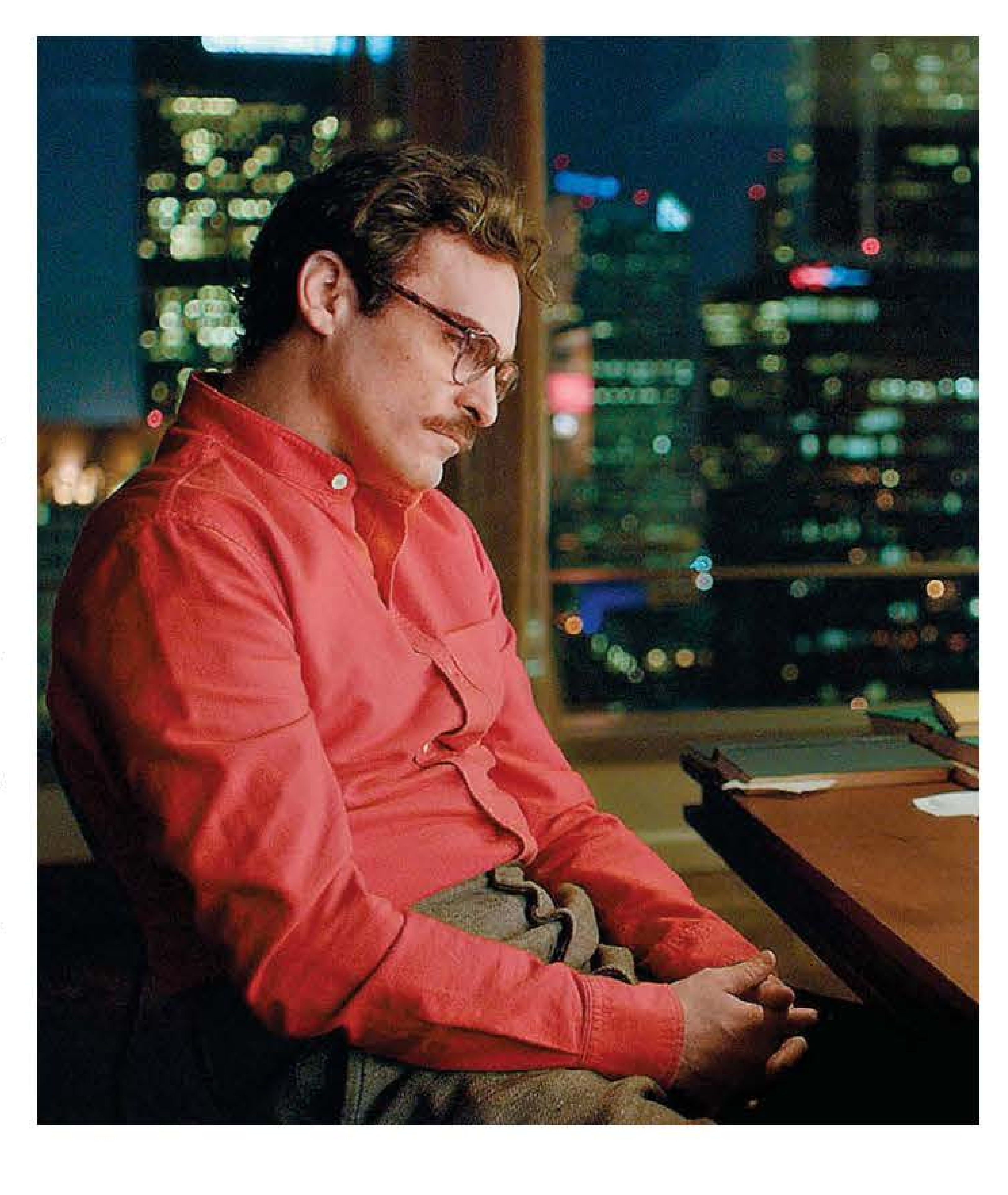
"We've all experienced heartbreak in one form or another and the sometimes impossible feelings of loneliness that come with it," she says.

"This film, set in the near future, brings to life the inevitable sadness and the beauty of the human experience as we follow a relationship between a man grieving a lost marriage and his new-found AI companion."

2 JOJO RABBIT (2019)

Glass never thought a comedy-drama set in Nazi Germany during World War II would end up being one of her top five films, but this one, she says, will make you "laugh and cry and think and then cry some more".

"Another brilliant film starring Scarlett Johansson, and directed by a man I think is simply fantastic: Taika Waititi," she says of the filmmaker and actor from New Zealand.



Joaquin Phoenix stars as a writer who falls in love with his AI companion in *Her*.

REVIEW | **JAMES MARSH**

Familiar story

Netflix's The Imaginary is yet another film about pretend friends to hit screens this year, but it lacks the imagination to stand out from the crowd.



The Imaginary is adapted from a British children's novel. Pictures: Netflix

Audiences have been inundated this year with stories about imaginary friends, from John Krasinski's effects-heavy *IF* and Jeff Wadlow's insidious horror flick *Imaginary* to Netflix series *Eric*, featuring Benedict Cumberbatch's lumbering, Muppet-like alter-ego. They may address the subject matter differently, through whimsy, terror or trauma, but at the centre of each is a tale of abandonment resulting from a loss of innocence.

Yoshiyuki Momose's animated film *The Imaginary* now joins this growing fold of nostalgia-fuelled fantasies. Adapted from the 2014 British children's novel of the same name by A.F. Harrold, it approaches its story from the point of view of Rudger (voiced by Kokoro Terada), a blond-haired boy visible only to a little girl named Amanda (Rio Suzuki).

Rudger's very existence is thrown through a loop when Amanda is hospitalised, and he is magically transported to "The Town of Imaginaries", an otherworldly realm populated entirely by invented friends who, like Rudger, have been forgotten or abandoned by their human companions.

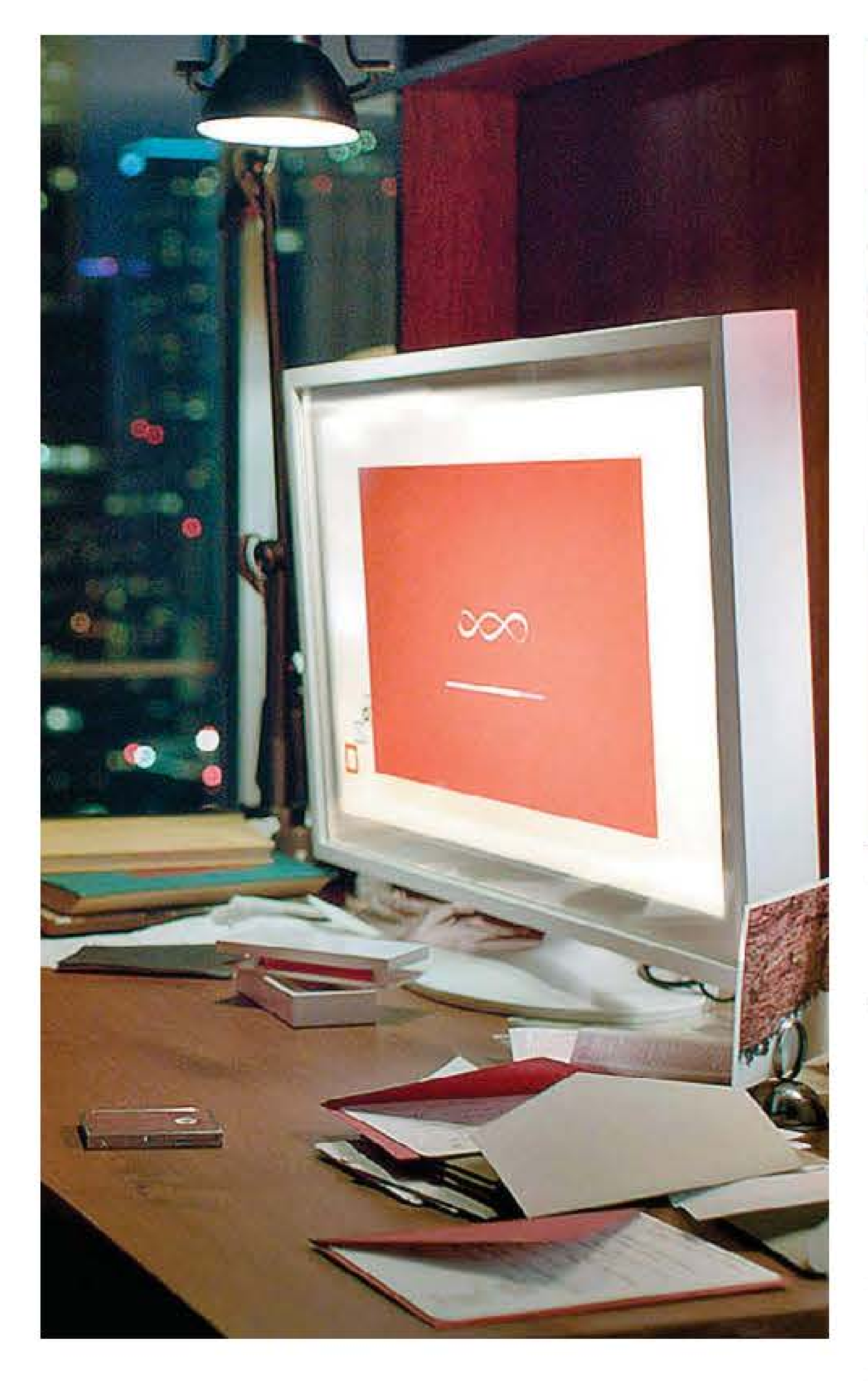
Rudger is welcomed by the Imaginaries, most notably plucky adventurer Emily (Riisa Naka), but his path back to Amanda's side is blocked by Mr Bunting, an evil mustachioed human who hunts down and eats Imaginaries. The villainous Bunting is accompanied by an eerie ghost-life waif, who lurks perennially by his side.

The Imaginary is the second full-length feature film from Studio Ponoc, founded in 2015 by Yoshiaki Nishimura, a former producer at Studio Ghibli – and the influence of the "House that Miyazaki built" is impossible to avoid.

The hand-drawn animation infuses the film with a vivid sense of wonder, both in sequences exploring the fantastical



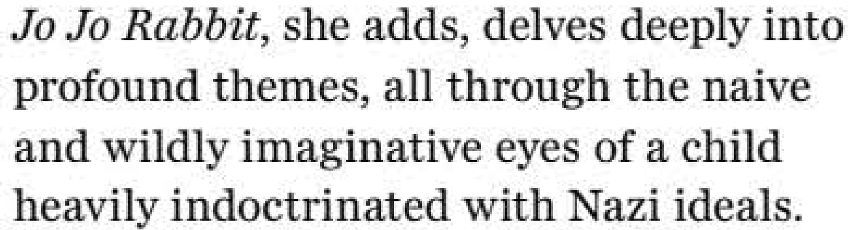
The Imaginary's hand-drawn animation infuses the film with a vivid sense of wonder.







Above, from left: Hayao Miyazaki's animated fantasy *Spirited Away*; Susan Sarandon (left) and Geena Davis star in *Thelma & Louise*.



Jo Jo Rabbit, she adds, delves deeply into profound themes, all through the naive and wildly imaginative eyes of a child heavily indoctrinated with Nazi ideals.

"There's a lot to unpack in this film, but at its core, it's one of the most beautiful coming-of-age stories I've ever seen," she says.

"Go in with an open mind and have a large tissue box at arm's length. Trust me, you'll need it. Side note: the soundtrack is spectacular."

3 SPIRITED AWAY (2001)

Glass is obsessed with this Japanese animated fantasy film written and directed by Hayao Miyazaki.

"I must have seen this film over a dozen times just in the past couple of years," she says. "I love how it takes me out of my own world and into something so completely fantastical that I lose track of reality almost completely.

Glass says she loves all of Studio Ghibli co-founder Miyazaki's work but that this particular story, about the adventures of a young girl, continues to have a profound effect.

"Throughout the film, as is true in many of [Miyazaki's] movies, you are able to see the good in villains and the flaws in the heroes," she says. "It's a reminder that no one is perfect and that everyone deserves to be seen with kindness and consideration."

4 THELMA & LOUISE (1991)

Glass can't recall how old she was when she first watched this adventure crime flick starring Susan Sarandon and Geena Davis as best friends Thelma and Louise. "But I know that I was young and that it made its mark."

The plot resonated with her. "Two women, on the open road, fighting for freedom. On some level, I can relate," she explains. "It's about the chasm between truth and equity. It's the complete rejection of mediocrity and of social norms for women in a time not so distant from our own, and in the end, the power of choice."

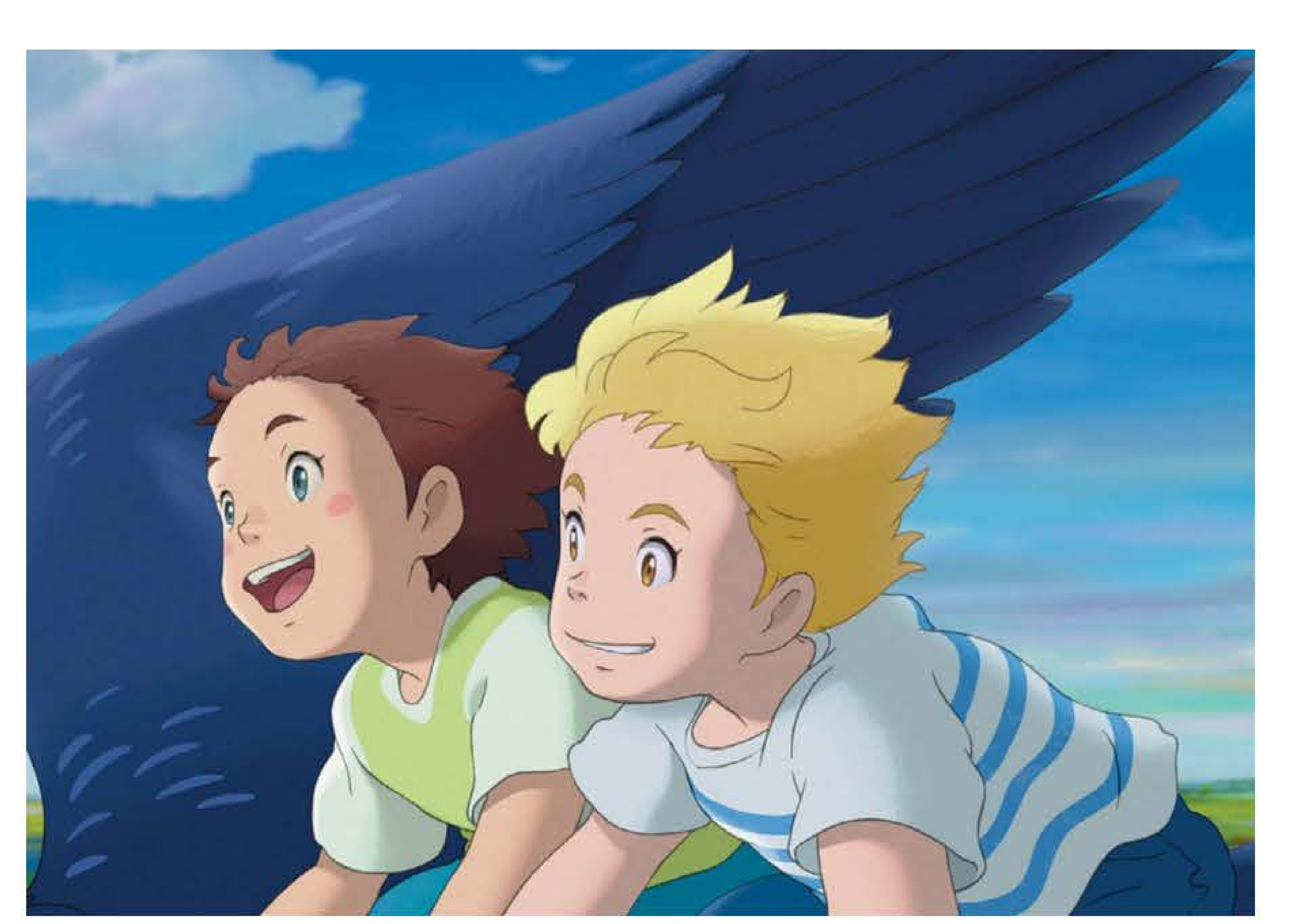
5 8 MILE (2002)

Glass says she rewatched *8 Mile* recently and was reminded of the genius of US rapper Eminem, who plays the lead role.

"Everything from the cinematography to the rap battles brings up a very particular feeling of 'keep on the grind' for me," she says.

"Set in and around Detroit, you can almost touch the desperation in every scene and when he hits the mic, you can just as easily imagine yourself in the room," she says.

"I love the energy of this film and of course, the music is insane. Give it a watch when you need a healthy dose of motivation. It'll get you there." ■



THE WORLD-BUILDING IS VAGUE AND ITS INTERNAL LOGIC SOMEWHAT CONFUSED, LEAVING IT UNCLEAR WHAT CAN EXIST IN THE REAL WORLD AND WHAT MANIFESTS SOLELY IN THE MINDS OF THE HUMAN CHARACTERS.

depths of human imagination and its more mundane episodes in England's sleepy suburbs.

Unfortunately, this transportive energy extends no further than the film's visual palette.

Amanda and her single mother, Lizzie (Sakura Ando), are thinly drawn and emotionally inert. Mr Bunting is never sufficiently threatening, while Rudger and his menagerie of new pals feel generic and uninspired.

The world-building itself is vague and its internal logic somewhat confused, leaving the viewer unclear about precisely what can exist in the real world and what manifests solely in the minds of the human characters.

Nishimura, who also penned the script for *The Imaginary*, might have us believe that it is our own fading connection to our childhood selves that prevents us from responding to his material. In truth, however, the film simply lacks much genuine imagination to call its own.

The Imaginary *will start streaming on Netflix on July 5.*

WHAT A VIEW | STEPHEN MCCARTY

Strait talking

Documentary maker S. Leo Chiang discusses his Oscar-nominated short film, covering the duel sensations Taiwan has in regard to mainland China – low-level trepidation but also a resigned indifference.



A still from *Island In Between* shows anti-landing spikes on the Quemoy Islands, with Xiamen in the distance. Pictures: courtesy of Island In Between

In 1967, Taiwan inaugurated a supersized audio cabinet called the Beishan Broadcast Wall.

Containing 48 loudspeakers that could be turned up way past 11, it still stands, 10 metres tall, on the Quemoy Islands (also called Kinmen), the frontline of the 1950s' Taiwan Strait crises. Although it no longer serves as a propaganda tool for blasting songs by Taiwanese pop queen Teresa Teng Li-chun (plus invitations to opposition troops to defect) towards the mainland Chinese city of Xiamen, roughly 3km away across the Strait, the wall does occasionally revert to type and relay Teng's "Sweet on You".

This is what happens in writer, producer and director S. Leo Chiang's *Island In Between* – nominated for the Best Documentary Short Film Oscar at this year's awards. But here's the even more curious thing: moments later, Chiang's film cuts to a video snippet from a concert he attended in Beijing's Workers' Stadium, in which, ironically, Taiwan's A-Mei is lustily delivering that same Teng signature tune. Moral? Perhaps the peoples either side of the channel aren't mortal enemies after all, even if the "Will they, won't they?" reunification-by-invasion question seems unanswerable.

"I think a lot of the Taiwanese population sees what China is doing as performance, for Western consumption, for show," says Chiang on video from Taipei. That despite all the sabre-rattling around Taiwan "it's not actually going to happen. It might be a foolish minimising of the situation, but I do feel like a lot of people think that way. For a person unfamiliar with the situation to come here right now, they would be like, 'This is nothing like what I read in the papers.'"

Island In Between, available on YouTube through The New York Times' Op-Docs, shows how life, on the Quemoy Islands and on the Taiwanese mainland, 160km distant, goes on, despite a constant, low-level trepidation.

"That's always there," says Chiang. "It's been there for 75 years. But this is really interesting: I read somewhere that the Taiwanese stock market never drops, no matter how many Chinese manoeuvres there are. It never affects the economy, which to me says people are thinking about [conflict], but no one is – well, not that they're not taking it seriously, but they're not allowing it to affect [daily life]," he says.

"There is a weird separation between this constant threat and low level of fear, and, 'This is a thriving economy, things are going well, we're building our lives, having families, going to night markets.' Somehow those two things are separate."



S. Leo Chiang (right) with journalists at the Beishan Broadcast Wall.

Chiang, who left his native Taipei as a teenager, first studied electrical and computer engineering at the University of California, Santa Barbara, followed by filmmaking at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles. He worked extensively in the United States and mainland China before returning to Taipei in 2017. And having come back, he is still wrestling with questions pertaining to his homeland's future.

"Some of what I'm dealing with now is because I left before I was a fully grown adult, so I didn't go through that transformation of consciousness while I was here," he says. "It was quite shocking to leave thinking one thing about where I'm from, then come back realising that what I thought as a child was so unrealistic, and propaganda."

Does he think reunification is inevitable?

"It wasn't like they taught us at school, 'Inevitably, this is what's going to happen,'" he says. "Well, they used to teach us that we were going to unify; there was never a narrative that the Chinese Communist Party was somehow going to be the default government. But the sense that the two sides were going to come together was how we were raised."

When not directing his own films, Chiang collaborates with other filmmakers and has served as producer, editor



Chiang has also served as producer, editor and cameraman for other filmmakers.

"RUBBING ELBOWS WITH MOVIE STARS WASN'T SOMETHING I WAS EXPECTING TO DO AS A DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER."

and cameraman. Feature-length documentaries bearing the Chiang stamp that have been peppered with awards and nominations include *A Village Called Versailles* (2009), focusing on the tribulations faced by the Vietnamese-American community of New Orleans in the wake of 2005's Hurricane Katrina; and *Our Time Machine* (2019), which considers the importance of art in alleviating problems associated with ageing.

But for now, he might be excused if he basks in his recent Academy Awards experience.

"It was surreal and fabulous," he says. "Rubbing elbows with movie stars wasn't something I was expecting to do as a documentary filmmaker. I lived in Los Angeles for a long time and had lots of friends who aspired to work in Hollywood. But I was always drawn to documentary filmmaking because I love travelling, meeting strange people and going to interesting places.

"I was obsessed with movies as a child, but it didn't seem like a real option or path I could pursue until I was much older and understood I could make my own way," he recalls. "And the way I was raised was always, 'You go to medical school, you become an engineer, a lawyer,' and I was pretty good at maths and sciences, so [engineering] felt like a natural thing for me to pursue. No one ever told me you could actually be a professional filmmaker!" ■

THING OF BEAUTY | **RICHARD LORD**

Speaking my language

Steven Berkoff's 1988 revival at London's Wyndham's Theatre of his own play Greek (1980), a reworking of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex updated to contemporary London, presented a confrontational, stylised, deconstructivist theatrical spectacle typical of the playwright, director and actor's work. Sean Curran, co-founder and co-artistic director of innovative Hong Kong theatre company Theatre du Pif, explains how it changed his life.

I was 23 and I'd been taking drama classes in Edinburgh, Scotland. My friend had been taking them and he said, "You should come along – it's a good laugh." I'd never done any drama before. I was at college, studying to become a physical education teacher, after previously hoping to become a football player.

The woman who ran the drama course had studied with Berkoff in mime school in the 1960s. She knew I was going down to visit friends in London in the summer, and she said, "You should go and see one of Steven's productions."

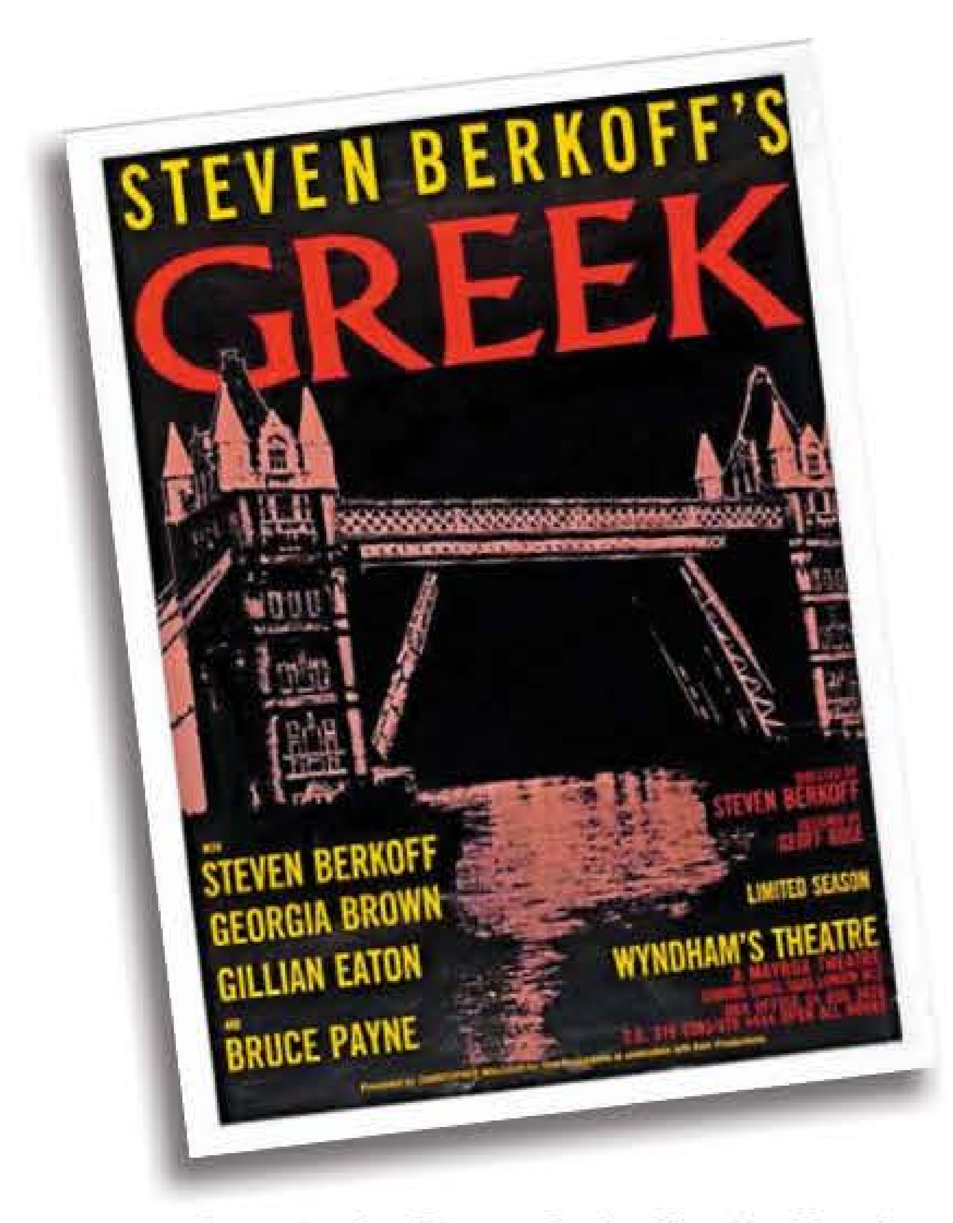
My only experience of theatre had been pantomime, which was great, and at school, when they took us to the Lyceum (one of Edinburgh's leading performance venues) to see *Romeo and Juliet*, I remember being bored and talking with my friends.

I went along to Wyndham's Theatre not knowing what to expect, and it just kind of blew me away. I went into this very old theatre, and then it opened and there were just four actors on stage with a table and chairs – no set, no props. The play was so physical, violent, funny and sexy. The way Berkoff performed it, there was a real rapport between the actors and the audience. And there was the language – he was writing in cockney vernacular, but it was something I could immediately get.

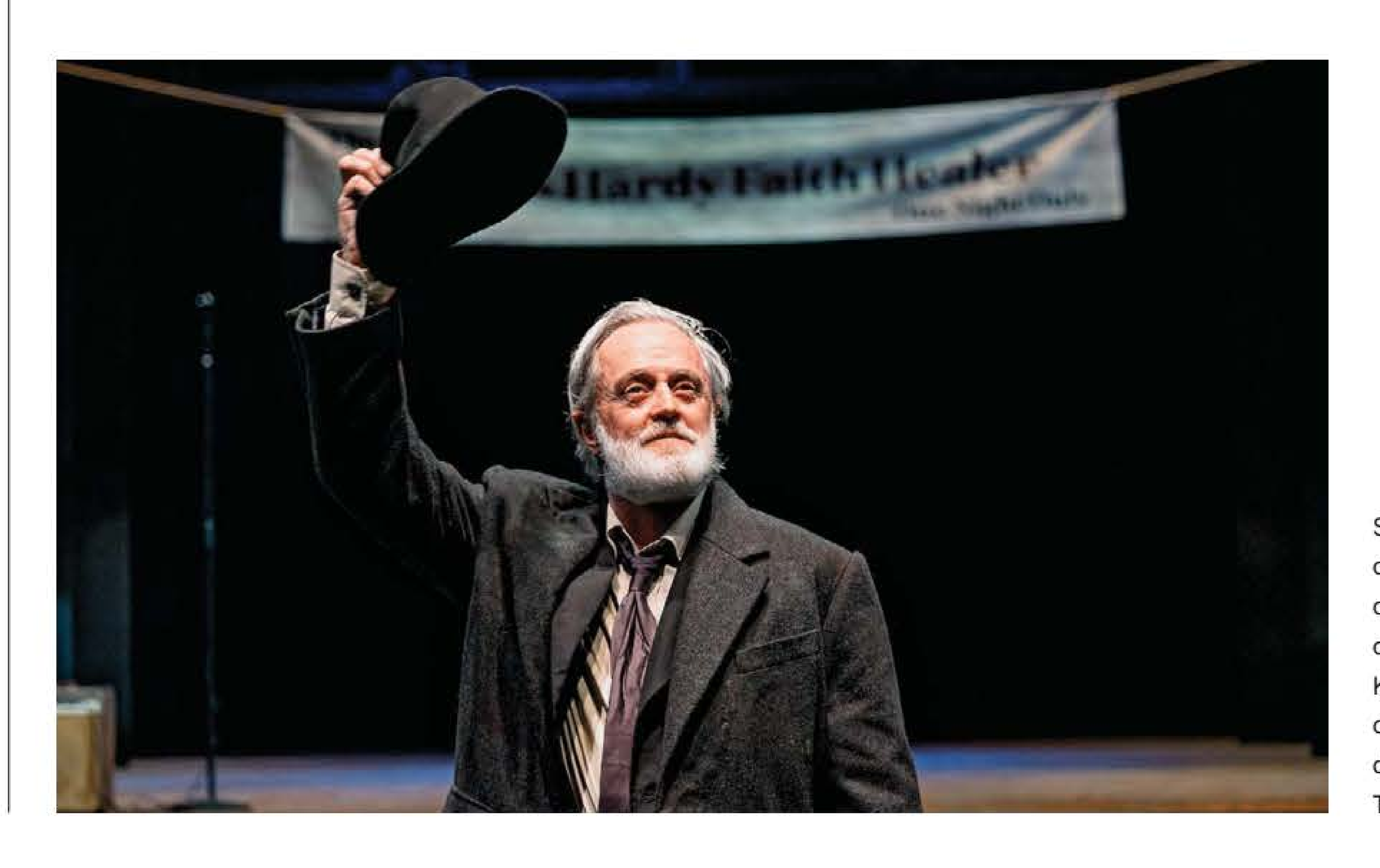
It had such a big influence on my career. After seeing the play and having such a strong reaction to it, I wanted to find out more about Berkoff. I discovered that he'd worked with a guy in Paris called Jacques Lecoq. I wanted to follow in his footsteps, so I applied to Lecoq's school in Paris and spent two years there. It then started to make sense to me, what I'd watched in the theatre. He taught people to be creators of their own work, not just wait for an agent to get it for them. I realised what's what Berkoff was doing. He was a struggling, jobbing actor, so he made his own work.

When I met Bonni (his professional and personal partner, Hongkonger Bonni Chan), we started doing something similar to Berkoff: write our own stuff. One of the things that influenced me was the physicality of the performance – you could go in there not knowing English and still understand it. We also had to find a language people could get even if they didn't know much English.

Watching him set me on my own way. It really is a difficult profession, and I wouldn't be in theatre any more if I hadn't gone down that path: making the theatre you want to make rather than waiting for someone else to come along.



A poster for Steven Berkoff's play *Greek* at London's Wyndham's Theatre.



Sean Curran, co-founder and co-artistic director of innovative Hong Kong theatre company Theatre du Pif. Picture: Theatre du Pif



Picture: Wesley Jamison / John David Dela Peri

Wesley Jamison (centre) in the music video for "Jungle Fever", about the racial fetishisation black men sometimes face.

Finding his voice

Singer Wesley Jamison grew up an introvert but came out of his shell in Hong Kong, tackling a lack of black representation along the way.

BY **ASHLYN CHAK**

Wesley Jamison grew up in a musical household in the Paris suburbs and has always loved to sing, but due to his introverted nature and his parents' experiences in the music industry, he didn't seriously considered pursuing it as a career until he moved halfway across the world to Hong Kong. That was 10 years ago. Since then, he has come out of his shell, become a songwriter and helped promote the local hip hop and R&B scenes.

"I repressed it a lot, I think. I had to leave [...] to start feeling like maybe I can do something [with music]," he says. "My mum is a singer and I used to follow her to the studio and shows, but she was strict and never wanted me to sing because it's a tough job."

His father's diverse musical tastes helped him discover different genres when he was growing up, he adds.

His one true love, however, is R&B. "It began when I was young, just hearing 90s and early 2000s R&B at home. The culture of where I'm from exposed me to a lot of hip hop, to which R&B is tied. I was and still am very introverted so I wasn't partying that much [as a teenager], and R&B is a lot of love songs, which was stuff that I wasn't living but thought, 'Man, it sounds really good.'"

Towards the end of 2014, after graduating with a master's degree in engineering, Jamison flew from Paris to Hong Kong on a whim, as he "wanted to see something completely different". He quickly fell in love with the city and decided to stay. Soon after, he met Hong Kong-based rapper Christopher Onoja, who invited him to try his hand (or rather, voice) on the hook of a song. "We tried it, liked it and started writing more songs," says Jamison.

The duo co-founded events company Mama Told Me in January 2017, citing a lack of black and non-Cantonese-speaking representation in Hong Kong's hip hop scene.

"Chris and I were frustrated about not having a platform to perform, or the few gigs that we would have would mostly be reggae or drum and bass events – which was still good – but at the end of the day, we wanted to find a hip hop crowd, so we started our own," Jamison says. "We were active pre-Covid and stayed active during Covid, with digital content such as interviews on our YouTube channel."

In July 2023, he redirected his energy towards another event organiser, R&B Hours, which he co-founded with DJ Minou, a Hong Kong-based musician and event organiser also from France. "For a long time, we talked about how great it'd be to do an R&B-only party," says Jamison. "No rap, no hip hop – only R&B and ballads. At first, we weren't sure if we would find a big enough crowd for it but it's got really popular and it's going great."

While R&B is Jamison's favourite genre, he does not call himself an R&B musician. "Referring to myself as an R&B artist means that I need to sing to a crazy level. I can sing, but I respect the craft too much to call myself that. I just do what I like, I guess."

Jamison has released two R&B albums: *Going Through It* in 2021 and a deluxe version, *Still Going Through It*, in 2022. "I'm not that great at expressing myself in real life, so I write a lot of my feelings into the songs, which is part of R&B culture," he says. "You hear a 90s R&B ballad and it just makes you feel like you're the main character. It's like a movie, almost."

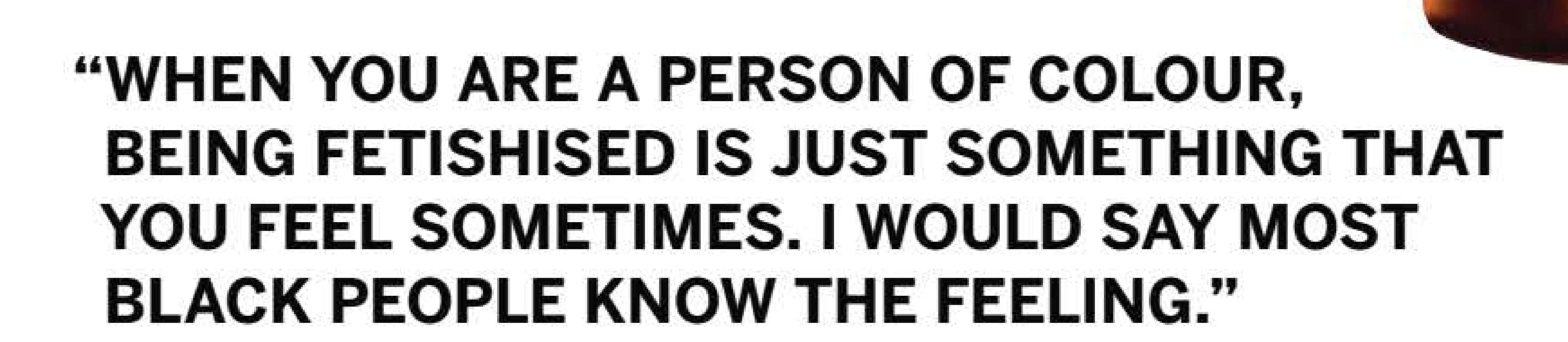
However, his latest release, in December 2023 – a music video for his single "Jungle Fever" – has nothing to do with film or "main character energy". "It's an idea that I've had for years," Jamison says. "Jungle fever [the attraction of non-black people towards black people] is not something that only happens in Hong Kong, the same way that there's 'yellow fever'. When you are a person of colour, being fetishised is just something that you feel sometimes in your life. I would say that most black people know the feeling."

Jamison says he loves watching the reaction of first-time listeners. "They're like, 'What? No!'" he laughs. "That's really satisfying as well."

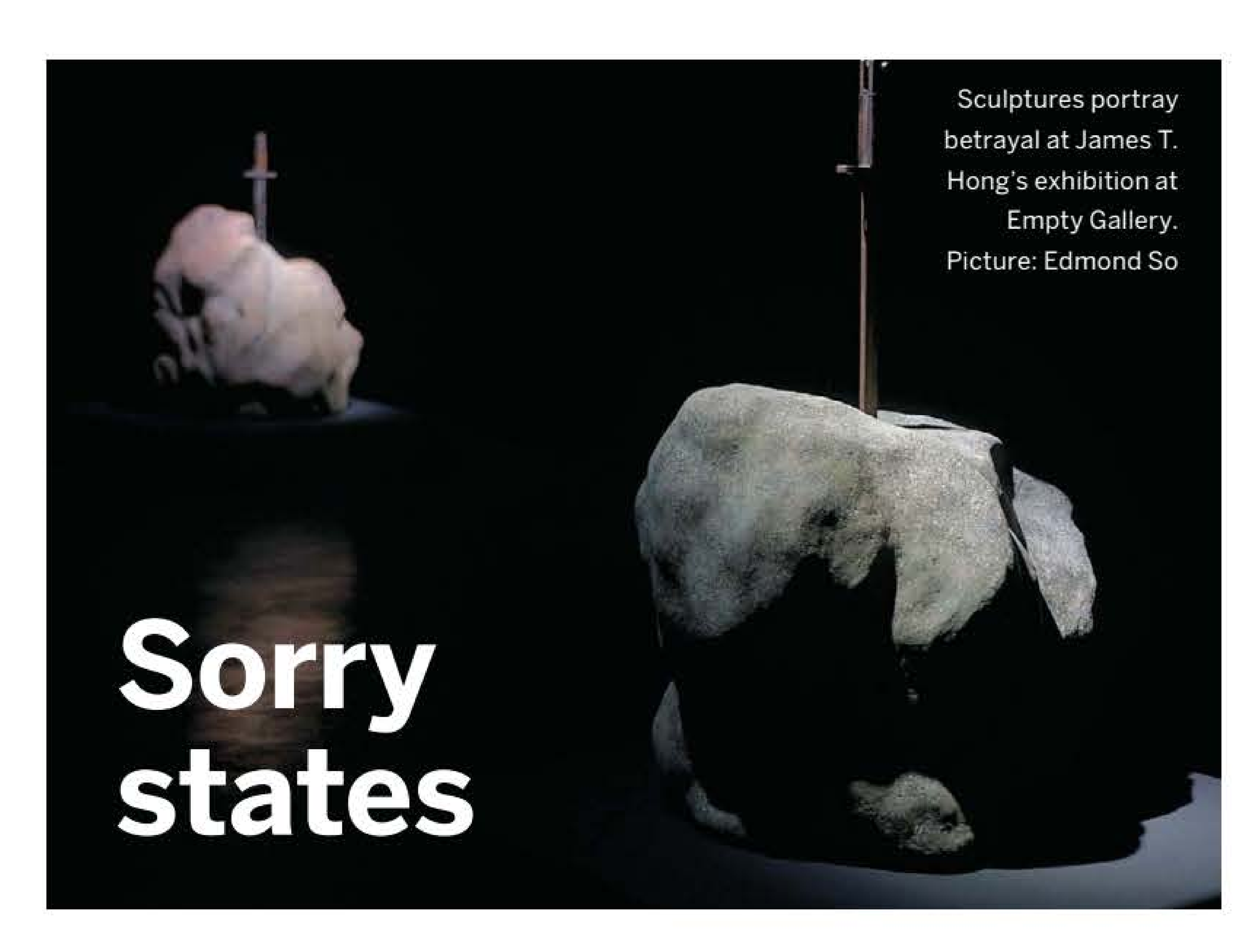
On July 13, Jamison will perform live at R&B Hours' first anniversary party, which will also see three DJs – Dantes, Featurz and Minou – take turns blasting smooth R&B melodies from the 1980s to the 2010s at the P Lounge by Plaisance, in Central.

R&B Hours: One year Anniversary at P Lounge by Plaisance, G/F, 1 Duddell St, Central, July 13, 10pm-3am. For more information, visit R&B Hours' Instagram page.

Jamison performs at Un1ted Fest 2022 at AsiaWorld-Expo. Picture: John Razalo



"WHEN YOU ARE A PERSON OF COLOUR, BEING FETISHISED IS JUST SOMETHING THAT YOU FEEL SOMETIMES. I WOULD SAY MOST BLACK PEOPLE KNOW THE FEELING."



Sculptures portray betrayal at James T. Hong's exhibition at Empty Gallery. Picture: Edmond So

Sorry states

James T. Hong's video installation of 161 political apologies shows the performative nature of nations addressing their humanitarian crimes.

BY **MABEL LUI**

On December 7, 1970, German chancellor Willy Brandt famously fell to his knees after laying a wreath of white flowers at the foot of the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes, in Warsaw, Poland. This gesture of penance, on behalf of Germany for crimes committed by the Nazis, was one of the first political apologies that was broadcast on television for the public to see.

Today, that video clip constitutes the opening of *Apologies*, a three-channel video installation by Taiwanese-American artist and filmmaker James T. Hong. Featuring 161 televised political apologies, the work showcases politicians from around the world – including presidents, heads of state and cabinet ministers – offering apologies for their nations' various crimes against humanity.

The installation, currently on show at Empty Gallery in Tin Wan as part of Hong's solo exhibition "Apologies and Other Regrets", was first presented by the artist in 2012. Back then, the video lasted around an hour; now, it runs for a total of seven hours and seven minutes, with the apologies appearing in chronological order: from that of Willy Brandt in 1970 to Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte's 2022 apology for the Netherlands' role in slavery.

Hong came up with the idea after encountering many Chinese people who claimed that Japan never apologised for the second Sino-Japanese war. At the time, he was interviewing and conducting research on the victims of political and biological warfare for his documentaries.

"Originally, I would correct them and say that Japan actually did apologise a few times," he says. "But the Chinese I encountered never believed me, so I started compiling these apologies, starting with Japan, and then it spread to other nations."

Year after year, the artist updated *Apologies* with new recordings. Today, it provides a snapshot of modern history while accounting for some of the world's most egregious atrocities.

The clips include United States president Ronald Reagan's 1988 apology to the Japanese-Americans who were interned during World War II; Guatemalan president Alfonso Portillo's 2001 apology for the Dos Erres massacre of more than 200 villagers; Pope Francis' 2014 apology for church sexual abuse; the 2015 apology of Japanese minister of foreign affairs, Fumio Kishida, on behalf of prime minister Shinzo Abe, for the Japanese military's use of South Korean comfort women during Japan's occupation; and French President Emmanuel Macron's 2021 apology for French mistreatment and abandonment of Algerian Harki fighters.

"I'm a completist," Hong says of his decision to include every relevant apology he can find. "That's why it's over seven hours long."

For visitors, these seven hours offer much to dissect and consider. First, there is the inherent performative nature of these political apologies – often, they feature a sense of false sincerity, passive language and narrative arcs that appeal to people's emotions.

"Most of the apologies, to me, are bulls***," Hong says. "This is just the truth. Not all, but most, deal with unpardonable crimes against humanity. I doubt there are politicians who just feel bad about something and want to apologise for it […] The point of an apology [is] to gain political capital."

If visitors watch *Apologies* from start to finish they will see that Western and liberal nations tend to apologise more, given the need for their politicians to sustain widespread public support and thus maintain influence, but other nations have become increasingly willing to apologise as well, Hong explains. Over time, the apologies have got longer and more polished; the subject matter addressed has also evolved, he says.

"There is a liberal progression of topics that can be addressed and can be apologised for," he says. "When Germany was first apologising for the Holocaust, just a few decades after World War II, one would never think of apologising to African-Americans, to Native Americans, or to the LGBTQIA+ [community]."

What is also interesting is not just the countries that choose to apologise but the ones that do not. Certain Eastern European countries that had Communist governments, for example, do not tend to apologise – there is only one clip in *Apologies* from Russia (it doesn't feature Vladimir Putin) – and there are certain non-democratic countries in Asia that refrain from televised apologies as well.

"I don't have any state apology from Vietnam, and there are no apologies from Thailand, which is a monarchy – which is fascinating," Hong says. "Thailand is a developing country with human rights abuses every day. You'd think they have a lot to apologise for, but Thailand never has, not that I know of."

And while the frequency of apologies has accelerated over the years, Hong is generally critical of them because they rarely lead to change. "It's not the apology that's so important. It's the accountability and justice that's more important."

Aside from *Apologies*, Hong is also showing Stabbed in the Back, a series of four sculptures that portray the state of betrayal. Inspired by the British fable of the Sword in the Stone, the sculptures each feature an artificial styrofoam rock being stabbed by a real bayonet used during the second Sino-Japanese war, which Hong sourced from collectors and Japanese soldiers.

"This relates to *Apologies,* too – how governments are supposed to protect their citizens, but in the end, oppresses them," he says. "I thought more about literally being stabbed in the back, so about a best friend gossiping on you, a spouse divorcing you, a family member betraying you, and how this idea of trust and betrayal becomes a universal experience that we all have that doesn't necessarily result in death, but still can result in psychological trauma."

"Apologies and Other Regrets", Empty Gallery, 18-19/F, Grand Marine Centre, 3 Yue Fung Street, Tin Wan, Tue-Sat 11am-7pm. Until August 17.





Far left: Pope Francis apologises for church sexual abuse in Hong's video installation *Apologies*. Picture: Edmond So
Left: Hong at Empty Gallery in Tin Wan. Picture: Mabel Lui

Say your prayers

Hong Kong's largest mosque, the Kowloon Masjid is one of Tsim Sha Tsui's most striking buildings, but it is inside that provides the most spectacular sights.

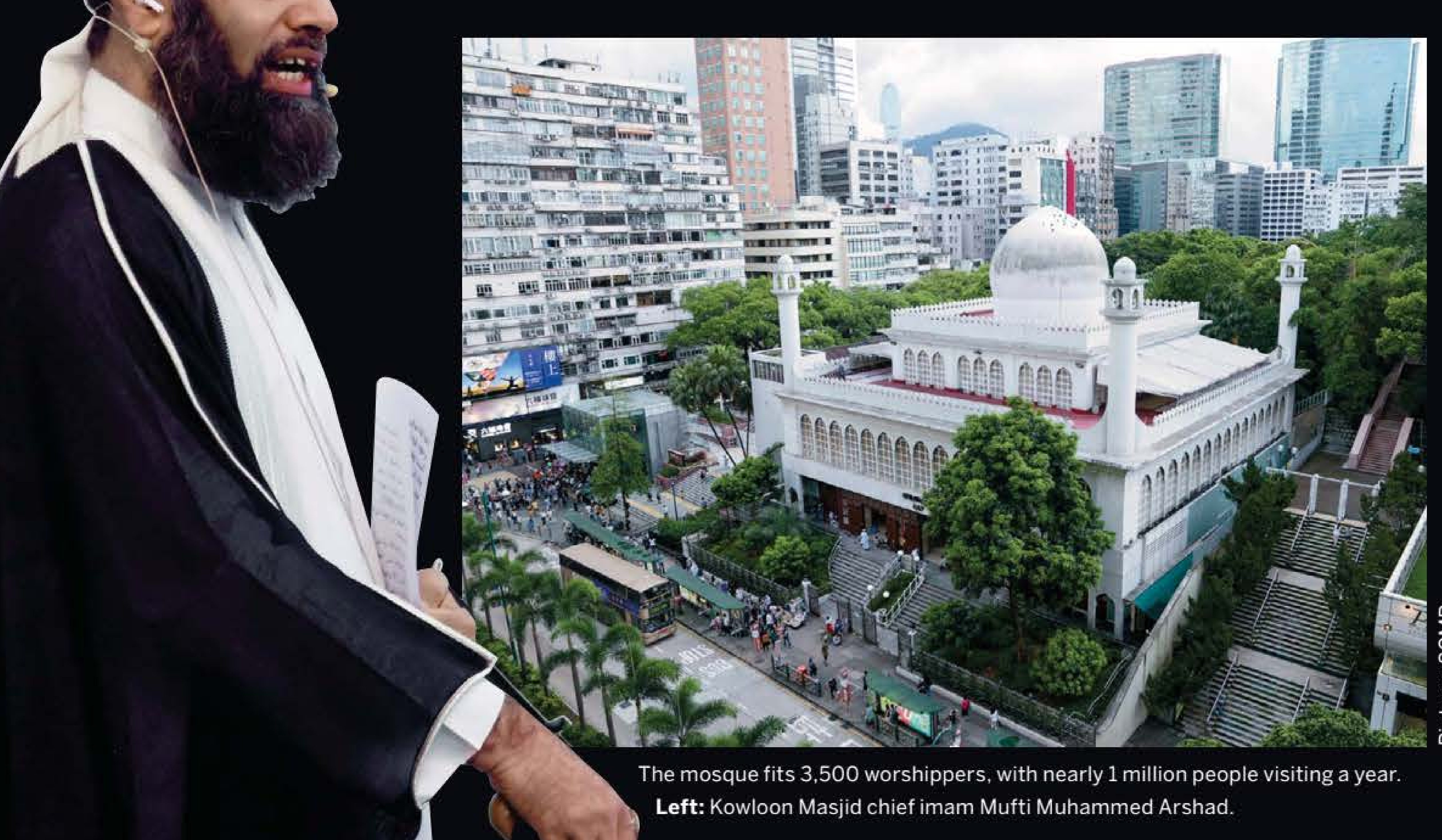
BY **ERIKA NA**



Most Hongkongers will have seen it, but far fewer will have ventured inside. Out of the five main mosques in Hong Kong, the Kowloon Masjid – *masjid* meaning "mosque" in Arabic – is the largest in the city and the oldest in Kowloon.

Thousands of people pass it every day, given its prime location outside Tsim Sha Tsui MTR station's A1 exit. The neighbourhood is a must-visit area for tourists, where they can shop, dine and catch an amazing view of Victoria Harbour. For locals, it is a popular meeting place.

People do not notice the mosque just because of where it is. The large white square edifice features arabesque window decorations on all sides, making it instantly stand out from its surroundings. A pointed dome protrudes from the centre of the structure's roof, while four 11-metre-tall minarets rise from each corner.



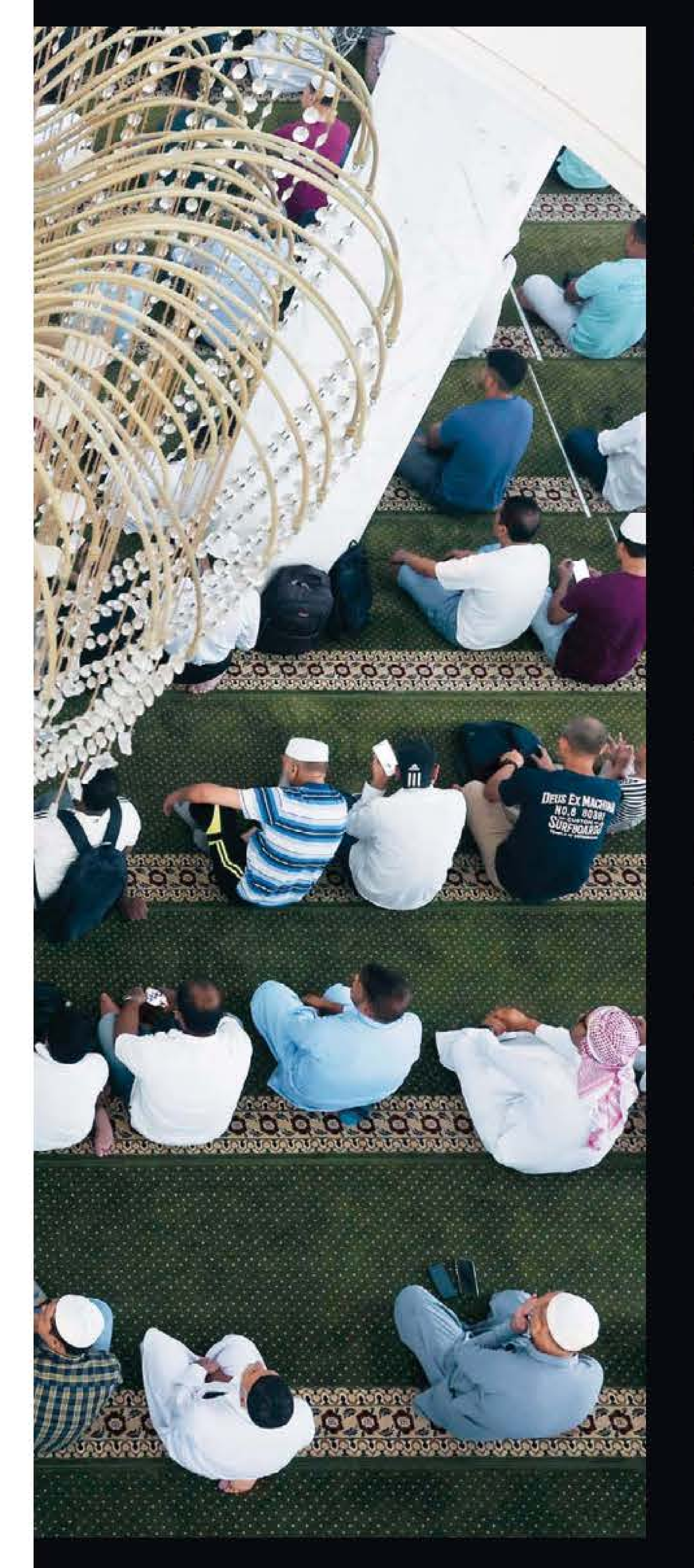
Picture: SCMP

The mosque fits 3,500 worshippers, with nearly 1 million people visiting a year. **Left:** Kowloon Masjid chief imam Mufti Muhammed Arshad.

Many pedestrians, especially tourists, throw curious glances at the mosque from beyond the fence that separates the building from Nathan Road. Some even stop to discuss whether they should go and see what is inside. For many non-Muslims, it is a mystery whether they are allowed in. Nearly all decide to keep walking.

Mufti Muhammad Arshad, the chief imam of Hong Kong, and the imam and khatib of the Kowloon Masjid since 2001, says everyone is welcome.

For many of the roughly 1.9 billion Muslims around the world, mosques are indispensable parts of their lives. They can gather there to pray, which they do facing Mecca, the birthplace of Islam's founding prophet, Muhammad. People also gather in mosques to celebrate the most important religious holidays, such as Eid al-Fitr, the day that marks the end of Ramadan.







Picture: Jelly Tse

Clockwise from left: male Muslims attend Friday prayers at the Kowloon Masjid; boys study the Koran; women queue outside the mosque to celebrate Eid-al-Fitr, in 2022; the mosque's prayer hall. Pictures: Jonathan Wong

The Kowloon Masjid was built in 1896 as a place of worship for Muslim soldiers in the British Army stationed nearby. The original mosque looked quite different, with many more smaller domes featuring narrow spires.

The current structure opened in 1984, after the original building was taken down having suffered damage during underground construction of the MTR. The mosque now fits 3,500 worshippers and is visited by nearly 1 million people a year.

What makes the mosque unique is the diversity of the Muslim community in Hong Kong. Although the 300,000 Muslims in the city make up but a small fraction of the SAR's total population of 7.5 million, they exhibit great ethnic diversity. The largest group, at around half, are Indonesians – mostly foreign domestic helpers – followed by 50,000 Chinese and 30,000 Pakistanis, according to government estimates. The remainder includes Indians, Bangladeshis, Turks and people from various African countries.

Such diversity is best displayed on Fridays, when the congregational noon prayer, called Jum'ah, is held, which is mandatory for male Muslims and recommended for female Muslims. The mosque's prayer hall, a beautiful space with light-green carpets, fills up completely with men of various ethnic backgrounds, ages and attires.

There are young black men with dreadlocks in African dashikis sitting next to elderly South Asian men with big, bushy beards wearing white Muslim robes and caps. Women worshippers wearing hijabs gather in a separate space, as Islamic rules require men and women to pray separately.

The imam gives his sermon in three languages – Urdu, English and Arabic – to speak to all worshippers. Once the sermon is over, it is time for the prayer. Men stand shoulder to shoulder, holding their forearms with opposite hands with their eyes closed. The chief imam chants first. When everyone in the hall chants back and prostrates at the same time, they are so in sync that it seems like they have become one large organism. When they are all fully prostrated, their foreheads and noses touching the carpet, their ethnic and external differences vanish. It is an incredible sight, difficult to imagine for those who have not seen it.



People climb a staircase inside the mosque before Friday prayers. Picture: Jonathan Wong

While the older Muslims gather regularly in the mosque for prayers, younger ones come to study the Koran, the holy book of Islam, with tutors. Just like the prayer sessions, the lessons are divided between boys and girls.

The mood is much lighter here than in the prayer hall. Young boys, many of them wearing white Muslim caps, rock their bodies rhythmically as they sing verses from the Koran in Arabic.

It seems likely that these young Hongkongers will join the adults in the prayer hall in time, whether it be in the Kowloon Masjid, or at another mosque somewhere else in the world. ■

REFLECTIONS | WEE KEK KOON

Sects appeal

On the sad occasion of the death of a friend's father recently, I came across the Baitiangong Universal Spiritual Movement, a new religious movement with members in Malaysia and Singapore, one of whom was the deceased.

Baitiangong, literally "worshipping the Lord of Heaven" in Mandarin, was founded by Chew Choon Ming (1936-2000) almost 50 years ago in Malaysia. After claiming to have received a series of visions in February 1976, Chew began preaching a syncretic belief system in which adherents worship a single deity, "Tiangong", or the Creator, and engage in spiritual cultivation through meditation and their conduct.

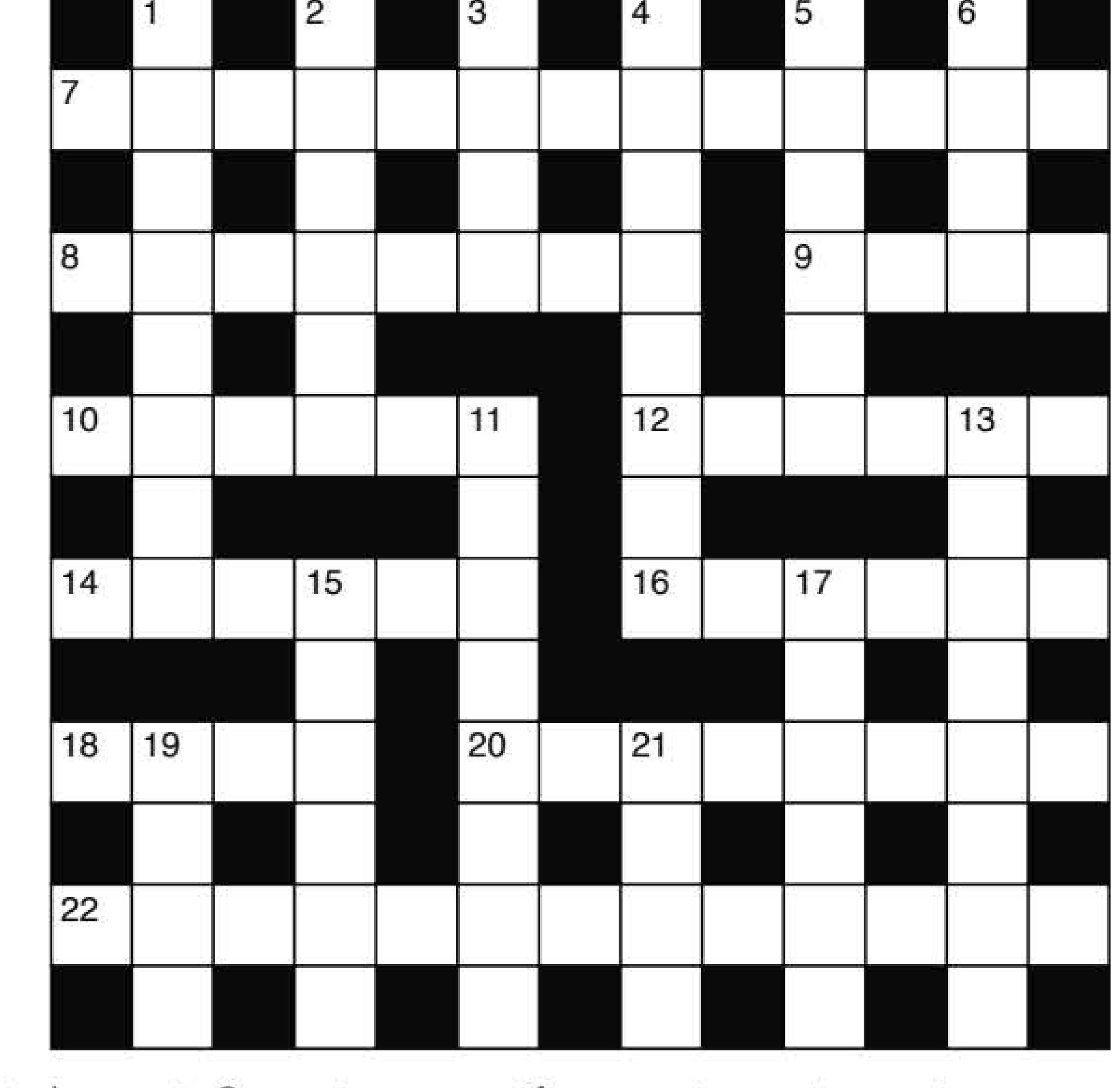
Outsiders might be tempted to label Baitiangong a cult, but "new religious movement" is a more accurate term to describe a faith-based community that is outside the religious mainstream.

There were many new religious movements throughout China's past, but one that had a huge impact on early modern Chinese history was the Bai Shangdi Hui, or God Worshipping Society, founded by Hong Xiuquan (1814-1864), who was born into a Hakka family in Guangdong province.

Having failed the imperial examinations several times by the late 1830s, Hong apparently suffered a nervous breakdown, during which he had multiple visions. In 1843, after studying Christian publications he had obtained from Protestant Christian missionaries, he interpreted his visions as divine revelations. He realised that he was the son of the Christian god and the younger brother of Jesus Christ. It was this god who, in his visions, had instructed him to purge the world of demon worship.

By 1850, Hong had amassed between 10,000 and 30,000 followers, which alarmed the Qing dynasty. The ensuing armed conflicts between Hong's God Worshipping Society and government troops plunged the country into a full-blown civil war.

In January 1851, Hong declared himself Heavenly King of the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace (Taiping Tianguo), a theocratic state founded on Hong's version of Christianity. Two years later, he captured Nanjing, which he made his capital. By the time the Qing forces quelled the Taiping Rebellion, as it was called, in 1864, between 20 and 30 million people had died, and the economy in southern China was devastated.


Hong Xiuquan (1814-1864)
Picture: Getty Images

Despite its victory, the Qing dynasty never recovered from the rebellion. In the following decades, a host of factors conspired to bring about the dynasty's decline and eventual demise.

Sunday Crossword

ACROSS
- 7 Not showy (13)
- 8 Important (8)
- 9 Row (4)
- 10 Concurred (6)
- 12 Elf (6)
- 14 Mason's tool (6)
- 16 Gloomy (6)
- 18 Fairy (4)
- 20 Speed (8)
- 22 Scarce (2,5,6)

DOWN
- 1 Imperil (8)
- 2 Span (6)
- 3 Stupefy (4)
- 4 Fenced in (8)
- 5 Sour (6)
- 6 Remedy (4)
- 11 Distribution (8)
- 13 Strangle (8)
- 15 Heaviness (6)
- 17 Get free (6)
- 19 Sea-eagle (4)
- 21 Endure (4)

SOLUTIONS Across: 7 Unpretentious; 8 Cardinal; 9 Tier; 10 Agreed; 12 Sprite; 14 Trowel; 16 Dreary; 18 Peri; 20 Velocity; 22 In short supply. Down: 1 Endanger; 2 Bridge; 3 Stun; 4 Enclosed; 5 Bitter; 6 Cure; 11 Delivery; 13 Throttle; 15 Weight; 17 Escape; 19 Erne; 21 Last.

QUIZ ANSWERS (from page 8): 1 D. **2** A. **3** False; Chan met Lee on the set of the 1972 film *Fist of Fury*, when Chan was a stuntman and Lee the star. **4** C. **5** A. **6** B. **7** *A Better Tomorrow*. **8** C. **9** A; Mike Teavee was though. **10** B.

Horoscopes

BY SALLY BROMPTON



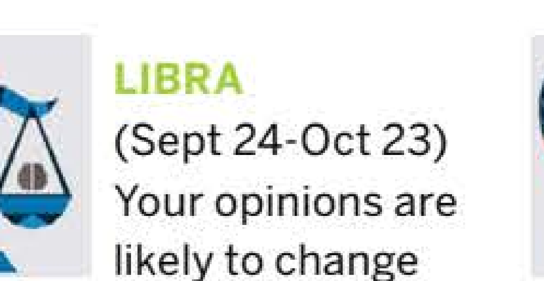
CANCER
(June 22-July 23)
The world is changing by the day and you must change with it or get left behind. Any ideas about holding on to the old way of doing things will soon evaporate but the good news is you will adapt with ease.



LEO
(July 24-Aug 23)
Mercury's move into your sign makes this the ideal time for planning. What you think about today is likely to become your reality, so think about the direction you want to take – it's where you'll soon be heading.



VIRGO
(Aug 24-Sept 23)
What is your greatest fear? What keeps you up? Whatever it is you'll confront it over the next few days and find the power it held was an illusion. Face your nightmares – and they will cease to exist.



LIBRA
(Sept 24-Oct 23)
Your opinions are likely to change as you become aware of possibilities that were hidden from you. Time spent with friends will not be wasted. On the contrary, what they say will inspire you to try harder.



SCORPIO
(Oct 24-Nov 22)
Your attitude to your career will become more serious. Not that you weren't serious but now you'll see what's at stake and it's enough for you to review your priorities. Someone has to be No 1 – why not you?



SAGITTARIUS
(Nov 23-Dec 21)
Even if you're the type who gets lost in details you'll be a bigger-picture person this week. As Mercury enters the most adventurous area of your chart you'll recognise just how broad your horizons can be.



CAPRICORN
(Dec 22-Jan 20)
If anyone thinks they can put one over on you they'll be disappointed – you will spot the deception straight away. How you react is up to you but make sure they know you know so they don't try it again.



AQUARIUS
(Jan 21-Feb 19)
You're doing a lot for others but not much for yourself. Maybe it's just your generosity but it is more likely that you've allowed people to gain a hold over you. Take back the initiative. Do only what's good for you.



PISCES
(Feb 20-Mar 20)
With mind planet Mercury entering the well-being area of your chart you could start imagining health problems. Of course, take care of yourself but don't go thinking every ache is a sign of your imminent demise.



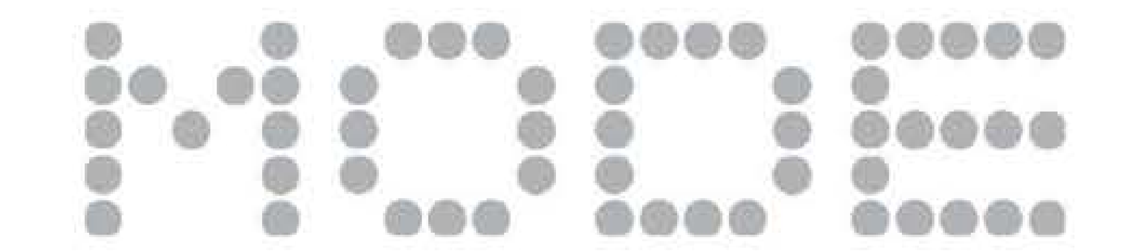
ARIES
(Mar 21-April 20)
At some point it will dawn on you that you have not met your potential. When that happens, plan something that will elevate you above the ordinary. Mercury's change of signs will help you to put it into effect.



TAURUS
(April 21-May 21)
Others will try every trick in the book to make you change your way of looking at an issue but that will only show how little they know you. Once you've made up your mind it would be easier to move a mountain.



GEMINI
(May 22-June 21)
Your powers of persuasion will get a boost as Mercury enters the communications angle of your chart. But remember, you don't have to convert everyone to your point of view. The world would be a dull place if you did.



Emperor Cinemas Plus+ Opens at THE SOUTHSIDE



To celebrate the grand opening of Emperor Cinemas Plus+ (THE SOUTHSIDE), VIP members can indulge themselves in an array of movies during the summer holidays with an exclusive ticket price of HK$65 from grand opening day until July 31, 2024. For new Emperor Cinemas VIP Member, the first 3,000 applicants who successfully register at a special 20% off membership fee of HK$130 with promotion code [SOUTHSIDE] will receive 3 complimentary movie tickets and a series of limited offers (available on a first-come, first-served basis).

3/F, THE SOUTHSIDE, Wong Chuk Hang I www.emperorcinemas.com



RIMOWA Introduces Emerald

Resonating with the natural beauty of the coveted stone, the RIMOWA Original suitcase's metallic grooved surface now comes in a rich and captivating shade of green reminiscent of the gem. Paired with the RIMOWA Original suitcase in Emerald, the seasonal capsule collection echoes the natural qualities cherished in the stone, with RIMOWA's emblematic grooves mirroring the intricate inclusions that lend emeralds their unique character. The gleaming aluminium exterior of both novelties gives further depth to the colour, evoking the allure of a precious gemstone.

www.rimowa.com

Melco Style Presents WAVEFest at Studio City



Melco Style's first-ever Music and Splash WAVEFest at Studio City Water Park created a huge splash in Macau's entertainment scene. Highly anticipated by audiences for its innovative blend of live music and dynamic splashtivities, the First Wave of Water Park WAVEFest was sold out in record time. WAVEFest has combined electrifying live music with the unique splashtivities at Macau's most adventurous water park. Guests not only enjoyed the dynamic music performances but also the vibrant atmosphere of water-based entertainment, making it a truly immersive experience.

www.studiocity-macau.com I www.melco-resorts.com



mtm labo Dual Essences for Day and Night

The custom-blended moisture building essence harnesses the power of four functions: enhanced water absorption, hydration, retention, and locking, to promote the healthy functioning of skin cells and prepare them for subsequent collagen repair. Meanwhile, the custom-blended skin repair essence deeply nourishes the skin with highly effective deep-sea collagen during the night, unleashing its triple repair power: repairing, restoring, and protecting aging and damaged cells. It strengthens the elastic fiber tissues and shields against daytime moisture loss, resulting in firm and resilient skin.

www.mtmlabo.com

Nespresso Summer Club



This summer, Nespresso is launching the Unforgettable Mediterranean Summer collection and a variety of refreshing iced coffees. Looking forward to embark on an adventure with Nespresso to discover and taste the hidden treasures of the Mediterranean region. Immerse yourself in the charm of the Mediterranean coast at Nespresso Summer Club with instagrammable spots perfectly designed for coffee lovers and capture unforgettable coffee moments at Nespresso summer photo booth.

Atrium, Gateway, Harbour City I www.nespresso.com/hk

Rémy Martin celebrates its 300th Anniversary



Born in 1724, the House of Rémy Martin celebrates 300 years of exceptional cognac-making this year. To mark its tricentenary, the House will connect past, present and future with a year of special activities around the theme 'We Dream Forward' and the release of an exceptional cognac, the 300th Anniversary Coupe. For three centuries the House has combined craft and innovation, passing it forward to build sustainable exception for the future.

www.remymartin.com



Tatcha Presents The Matcha Cleanse





A fragrance-free, soap-free gel cleanser with BHA alternatives that decongests pores and balances oil without stripping away essential moisture, priming skin to minimize makeup slip-off and shininess. The Matcha Cleanse decongests pores for smooth, refined skin; controls oil immediately and over time, maintains the skin's moisture barrier to avoid a dry, tight feeling. Also it can minimize makeup slip-off, reveals a clean canvas by smoothing skin texture and reducing excess oil and shine for better-looking makeup all day.

hk.tatcha.com



La Mer – The Serum Essence

Inspired by nature's symmetrical, geometric patterns, The Serum Essence redefines ageless skincare. Similar to the microscopic perfection of a snowflake, the surface of visibly healthy, youthful skin is formed from a symmetrical pattern of cells that resemble the internal structure of a crystal. These patterns at the micro level serve as the foundation of beauty at the macro level. In translating this natural phenomenon to skincare science, youthful results are achieved at an elevated level.

www.lamer.com.hk*